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HISTORY AND SOCIETY

SECOND SERIES

ADMINISTRATIVE RESPONSE TO AGRARIAN UNREST:  
A REPORT FROM TAMIL NADU

by

K.S. Subramanian

Second Series

Number III

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ADMINISTRATIVE RESPONSE TO AGRARIAN UNREST: A REPORT  
FROM TAMIL NADU

K. S. Subramanian

I

Agrarian tensions of varying kinds and intensity have been a persistent feature of the Indian rural scene. After independence, a highwater mark of tensions were seen in the Naxalite movement of the late 60's and early 70's. The movement was a political manifestation of the unresolved issues of India's inequitable agrarian set up.<sup>1</sup> The movement coincided with the Green Revolution in Indian agriculture and led observers to trace a correlation between the two.<sup>2</sup>

The aftermath of the Naxalite movement witnessed renewed efforts by the central and state governments to speed up the implementation of agrarian reforms. However, the initiative could not be sustained for several reasons.<sup>3</sup> This period also saw a change of emphasis in the strategy vis-a-vis the problem of rural poverty. In addition to reliance on growth as <sup>a</sup> pre-requisite for the reduction of poverty, unemployment and inequalities of income, wealth

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and economic power, a "target-group" oriented approach of delivery of inputs was devised in relation to specific poverty groups such as the Scheduled Castes and Tribes.<sup>4</sup> The approach has undergone modification in the light of experience in the subsequent period and the integrated Rural Development Programme (IRDP) is the latest version of the modus operandi for the alleviation of rural poverty.<sup>5</sup> The recent period has seen the induction of greater financial resources into poverty alleviation programmes without, however, disturbing the relative priorities of different objectives within the existing framework.<sup>6</sup>

Despite this, however, agrarian tensions in rural India have not disappeared. Indeed, official accounts would seem to show that agrarian tensions have increased during the post-Emergency period.<sup>7</sup> Academic observers have noted several new features in agrarian tensions in the recent period.<sup>8</sup> These new features include:<sup>9</sup> (i) brutalisation of class conflict in many rural areas; (ii) "structural interaction" of the administration with the rural power structure in the context of subsistence agriculture; (iii) escalation of rural violence as a result of bitterness against police repression;<sup>10</sup> (iv) in the absence of effective administrative and political intervention, emergence of rival militant organisations of the rural poor and the rural rich (such as the 'Lal Sena' and the 'Bhoomi Sena' in Bihar), and so on

The Planning Commission's well-known Task Force Report on agrarian reforms in the early 70's made a candid assessment of failures of policy implementation. In the same vein, an important recent report of the Government of India takes note of the qualitatively changed rural situation in India today.<sup>11</sup>

It calls for clarity on concepts of development and poverty alleviation and firm political commitment to a poor-oriented development path. It makes, among others, the following important points:

- i) The foremost political issue today is the unprecedented awakening and unrest among the rural poor whose poverty is inter-twined with social inequality and injustice;
- ii) Poverty is as much the product of inequitous and exploitative patterns of growth as of absence of growth. Increasing poverty can also accompany and be a by product of overall growth. Left to its own logic the dominant tendency of the system is in favour of the rich and not the poor;
- iii) Persistence of mass poverty and its aggravation in certain regions has its roots in the policy choices made in the mid-sixties in regard to agricultural planning.

iv) Policy makers have not absorbed the insights available from social science publications, viz.,

- a) the emerging "structural dualism" in society and economy;
- b) the aggravation of mass poverty; and
- c) the increasing disjunction between the growth objective and the anti-poverty objective.

It would be unrealistic to assume that anti-poverty programmes alone can counteract these trends.

v) The experience of many developing countries shows that it is the combination of effective state intervention from above and social initiative and mass mobilisation from below which produce significant results;

vi) There is need for an integrated approach to development and poverty eradication. Constraints of a dualistic structure can be reduced by -

- a) mass oriented agrarian reforms;
- b) labour-absorbing and land-augmenting technological innovation;
- c) Political decentralisation;
- d) Administrative restructuring to ensure planning from below;
- e) grass roots mobilisation of the poor.



- vii) Poverty is not a sectional problem to be dealt with by sectional programmes. Anti-poverty programmes should include measures to contain the rich and prevent the growth of consumerism of the elites.

In the light of the above, this paper makes a study of the role of the administration in the context of agrarian tensions in some of the rural pockets of Tamil Nadu in the recent period. The study is organised as follows: Section II contains an analysis of broad trends of violence against weaker sections and rural poverty in Tamil Nadu.<sup>11A</sup>

Section III draws attention to aspects of rural development administration in the state as brought out in a number of studies. Section - IV documents the role of the administration in handling the emerging political protest building up on a basis of serious agrarian discontent in the rural pockets of Dhamapuri and North Arcot districts of the state.<sup>12</sup>

Section V presents the findings from field work in Tamil Nadu based on informal interviews with a cross section of the rural poor and administrators at different levels. Section VI records observations on aspects of the broader policy vis-a-vis agrarian tensions.<sup>13</sup>

## II

One aspect of agrarian tensions<sup>14</sup> in regard to which official data are compiled is the incidence of violence

against the scheduled Castes (and Tribes) by members of the non-Scheduled Castes (and Tribes).<sup>15</sup> Due to a variety factors, this phenomenon of "atrocities"<sup>16</sup> has become increasingly salient since the mid 70's and was for a while an important and even acrimonious subject of public and parliamentary debate and controversy over the definition and characterisation between the Central Government on the one side and some of the state Government on the other.<sup>17</sup> The fact that under the present Constitution, "public order" is a state subject was used by some State Government (Congress-led as well as non-Congress-led) to forestall undue interest and concern on the part of the Central Government over increasing "atrocities" on weaker sections in their states. The Centre has sought, to some extent, to use the special role assigned to the state under Article 46 of the constitution for the welfare and protection of the Scheduled Castes and Tribes to prod state governments to action to check this violence.<sup>18</sup>

The violence takes various forms. In addition to 'cognisable' offences<sup>19</sup> there are a large number of "non-cognisable" offences which also take place but are not reported to the central government.<sup>20</sup> More pervasively, there are the offences against the provisions of the Protection of Civil Rights Act 1955. There are also spectacular outbursts of violence featuring, for example, organised killings of share croppers, marginal farmers, agricultural labourers, artisans and others, such as the Kilavemam incidents in

Tamil Nadu of 1968.<sup>21</sup> There have also been violent and organised movements of considerable magnitude against the Scheduled Castes by caste Hindu groups such as the Gujarat agitation of 1981.

The incidents of violence under the IPC have been on the increase recently, as brought out in official reports. The figure of incidents of 5,968 in 1976, went upto 10,879 in 1977 and 15,070 in 1978 and has remained high in the subsequent years.

Observers and analysts have noted that the newly emerging classes and castes in the rural India who are the perpetrators of the violence have been the beneficiaries of land reforms in the post-Independence period and also of the development process as a whole. These classes and castes perceive the efforts made by the Government for the development of the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes as an attempt to pamper them because of their numerical preponderance and political importance. The weaker sections however, may perceive these efforts as inadequate in themselves besides being ineffective in implementation.

The many poverty-focussed research studies published in the recent period, have shown that the fact that poverty grown has to do more with the structure of the economy than its rate of growth. Highly unequal distribution of land ownership, of income and wealth, concentration of economic surplus in a few enterprises and households and fragmented

allocative mechanisms have been the economic framework in which powerful dynamic forces operate to lower the living standards of significant sections of the rural population. This approach to poverty makes it clear that micro and macro-economic tinkering will not do and that structural change is needed. This means redistribution of productive wealth (and, consequently, redistribution of economic power) and increasing the participation of the poor in decision-making (and, consequently, enabling them to exercise political power).

After the early 70's when the slogan of 'Garibi Hatao' was launched, followed by the Emergency with the 20-Point Programme and so on, official efforts were made, (whatever their motivation), to awaken the rural poor to their social human and legal rights. During the Emergency, the Untouchability (offences) Act of 1955 was tightened up and re-enacted as the Protection of Civil Rights Act 1955; the Bonded Labour (Abolition) Act was passed; the Minimum Wages Act was sought to be strictly enforced; and so on. The ruling party cadres and the bureaucracy as a whole to some extent were mobilised carry the new thrust to the rural poor. There was also a major communications effort to reach the rural areas in a big way. Further, during the 70's it became clear that reliance on the growth factor alone would not be sufficient to achieve the basic objectives of Indian planning such as reduction of inequalities of income, wealth and economic power, removal of poverty and lessening of unemployment. The Fifth Five Year

Plan launched a "direct assault" on poverty and welfare programmes were formulated to benefit well-defined "target-groups" officially recognised as having been the victims of age-old oppression and discrimination viz. the Scheduled castes and Tribes. The Tribal Sub-Plan for the Scheduled Tribes and the Special Component Plan for the Scheduled Castes emerged. The SFDA (Small Farmers Development Agency) and MFAL (Marginal Farmers and Agricultural Labourers Development Programme), the earlier schemes, were later combined to form the IRDP (Integrate Rural Development Programme) which is the major anti poverty scheme today. Increased budget allocations have been found for this programme.

These factors have given a powerful fillip to the awareness of the rural masses and their willingness to fight for their social, human and legal rights. This awareness and consciousness (and not merely the worsening objective economic conditions) are the qualitatively new factor in the rural areas which (together with the determination of the newly-emerged rural social classes to resist them) has been leading to the increasing violence against the rural poor. The economic dependence of the Scheduled Castes on the rural power structure and their lack of political influence have been aggravating factors. The administrative machinery by reason of its class and caste composition has largely been siding with the rural vested interests.

The following comparative picture of "atrocities" against the Scheduled Castes in some of the states is derived from a recent official report.<sup>22</sup>

	<u>1982</u>	<u>1983</u>	<u>1984</u>
Andhra Pradesh	213	181	190
Bihar	2070	1809	1845
Gujarat	455	476	582
Karnataka	363	194	169
Madhya Pradesh	4749	5292	5537
Maharashtra	680	704	570
Rajasthan	1731	1604	1648
Uttar Pradesh	3977	3851	4200
Tamil Nadu	153	299	690

The following are the disaggregated figures in respect of Tamil Nadu from the same report.

	<u>1982</u>	<u>1983</u>	<u>1984</u>
Murder	05	14	06
Grievous Hurt	05	07	15
Rape	02	08	17
Arson	05	02	08
Other offences	<u>136</u>	<u>268</u>	<u>644</u>
	<u>153</u>	<u>299</u>	<u>690</u>

The states of Gujarat and Tamil Nadu have recently joined the North Indian states of Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan as the states in which the largest number of violent incidents are being reported.<sup>23</sup>

An evaluation undertaken by the Union Ministry of Home Affairs in regard to the rising "atrocities" against Scheduled Castes in Tamil Nadu towards the end of the 1970's makes a number of interesting observations.<sup>24</sup>

The report notes a "distinctly upward" in crimes against the SC's in the preceding four years and calls for serious stock taking on the part of the state government and, in particular, for tightening up the administrative machinery for preventing atrocities, protecting civil rights, building up a sense of security among the Scheduled Caste population and punishing offenders with "deterrent rapidity."

After drawing attention to weaknesses in the police department in Tamil Nadu, the survey gives a number of specific instances of atrocities against Scheduled Castes, observing that sudden out-breaks of violence are to be expected where a good deal of below-the-surface tension exists between the caste Hindus and Scheduled Castes throughout the state. Urging a "comprehensive and deep study" of the problem of crimes against the people of the Scheduled Castes, it sets out a number of concrete recommendations for implementation by the state government.

A strong plea is made that the overall background which led to alleged offences by Scheduled Castes be explored in depth; in the absence of this says the report,

the Harijans may justifiably feel that the brunt of the administration is brought to bear on them without their side of the story being heard.

By way of example, the report cites a case where the Scheduled Castes denied occupation of their allotted 'patta' lands by the legal machinations of a caste Hindu landlord, forcibly entered the land and allegedly assaulted some caste Hindus. In such cases, to deal with the problem from the 'law and order' angle alone might not improve the situation; the basic causes must be looked into and tackled.

The survey founds the incidence of offences under the PCRA Act to be significant and growing in Tamil Nadu, particularly in the interior villages. These offences included the denial of drinking water facilities, the stipulation of separate utensils and eating places in hotels, the denial of entry to temples or the use of approach roads to burial grounds, and the banning of the use of chappals and shoulder cloths by people of Scheduled Caste origin. In certain panchayats, Scheduled Caste persons were made to remain standing while meetings were in progress; other panchayats would not even hold meetings, preferring to conduct their business by circulating memoranda rather than call for the attendance of Scheduled Caste members.



Discussion with members of the Harijan Sevak Sangh brought to light the major factors which hampered the Scheduled Caste people in their fight to defend their basic civil rights; economic dependence on the perpetrators of social discrimination and physical attacks; a legal and judicial system not only slow to act but stacked against the Scheduled Caste people owing to the long arm of vested interests; and the social backwardness that is thrust upon the Scheduled Castes.

The survey report advocated that the state government undertake "a comprehensive and deep study of the problem of atrocities and PCR cases in all its aspects". Such a study should include an enumeration of cases reported to the police, the manner in which they were investigated and brought to trial, problems associated with witnesses being brought to court and giving their evidence without hindrance, and the number of cases ending in conviction and in acquittal, as well as the consideration of more basic questions pertaining to the socio-economic environment. The overall aim of such a study should be to make the "cutting edge" of the administration serve the poor and disadvantaged and act as a real protector of the rights of the Scheduled Caste people. To this end, the study must combine a concern for law and order with a firm social perspective and sense of commitment, and should be undertaken with the aid of voluntary as well as official bodies. Detailed field surveys and the analysis of data were considered essential components of such a study.

The number of incidents of atrocities on the Scheduled Castes in the more important districts in the state during the years 1982, 1983, 1984 and 1985 may be seen in Annexures I, II, and III.<sup>25</sup>

Analysis of these incidents from a socio-economic perspective is yet to be undertaken by the administrative machinery in Tamil Nadu. Since the reporting machinery is the police, the incidents continue to be classified in law and order terms rather than socio-economic. A number of these incidents can be traced to socio-economic factors and can give a clue as to the socio-economic processes in the rural sector.<sup>26</sup>

Expressions of concern over the increasing violence are not wanting.<sup>27</sup> However, these are not the same as effective intervention. A basis for effective intervention would be a comprehensive analysis of socio-economic causes behind these incidents of violence. Some features of the available information may be mentioned, First, only state level figures of incidents of violence are available at the central government, not the district level and below. District level figures are available at the state headquarters but the supporting information base for the cases is superficial and sketchy. Efforts are needed to build up comprehensive and adequate information base for a proper analysis. Second, no details are available either at the central or state levels of the so-called "other offences" of a cognisable nature the single largest category of cases in all the states. Third, a very large number of

non-cognisable cases are being reported in all states. No details are available of these. Fourth, neither at the central nor state levels the socio-economic background to these offences are gone into in any depth.

As noted, a striking feature of the situation in Tamil Nadu is the very sharp increase in the figures of "atrocities", in the recent period, specially under the head of "other offences" of a cognisable nature. No details are available regarding the increase in the number of non-cognisable offences. It may be reasonable to presume an equally sharp increase in the number of cases under this head as well.

An important task is to identify the main features of rural transformation under way in Tamil Nadu. We may now do this as briefly as we may.<sup>28</sup>

State policy vis-a-vis the rural economy in Tamil Nadu has had the two-fold objective of stimulating productive operations and bringing about some structural transformation. Both were meant to benefit the poor majority, the latter explicitly, the former indirectly.<sup>29</sup>

The policy measures to boost production have been quite successful, but the measures to bring about a structural change in the rural areas have not had much of an impact. The land ownership pattern has remained substantially unaltered despite land reform measures and the Minimum Wages Act has not protected the real wages of the agricultural labourers from falling.

Thus, the rural transformation in Tamil Nadu between 1950 and 1975 has been one of growth without major structural changes. In the matter of distribution of rural assets Tamil Nadu shows the greatest inequality.

Analysis of information available in the reports of the Agricultural Labour Enquiries, the All India Rural Labour Enquiry and the rounds of the National Sample Survey shows that "the earnings of agricultural labourers in all these years were way below what was necessary to be above the poverty line."<sup>30</sup> Slightly around 50 percent of the population in 1950 and slightly below 50 percent of the population in 1975 was estimated to be below the poverty line. The maximum reduction in the proportion of the poor was reached in the early 60's; thereafter, poverty increased steadily, even dramatically. According to an informed estimate<sup>31</sup> "close to 90 percent of farm families in rural Tamil Nadu must be taken as being below the poverty line." Thus, "a phenomenal increase in output of practically all produce in the rural areas, in particular foodgrains has left a vast proportion of the population even without a nutritionally adequate diet, not to speak of any tolerable level of living."<sup>32</sup>

Thus,<sup>33</sup> the rural areas have been experiencing a new dynamism unknown in the past, substantial increase in output, major changes in production techniques and in organisational patterns. The changes has been induced changes, arising from decisions taken outside the rural areas. Some of these changes

have been along desired lines, namely extensive cultivation through the use of modern implements, increase in output and systematic production patterns and more organised efforts through cooperatives and the like. These processes have also created some changes that were not desired namely, (i) the pressure on small farmers to leave their land and become agricultural labourers; (ii) the decline in the real wages of agricultural labourers; and (iii) the tendency of mass poverty to continue and increase. Thus, the development processes of the past have generated growth and affluence for the few and poverty and insecurity for the many.

A study within a triangular frame of growth, inequalities and poverty reveals a number of significant features of the rural economy of Tamil Nadu.<sup>34</sup>

In terms of long term growth rate of foodgrain production, Tamil Nadu with 1.83 percent has been distinctly below the all India average of 2.77 percent. Per capita foodgrain production in Tamil Nadu, currently at the level of 145 Kg. per annum, is also below the all India average of 166.3 Kg. and below that in 9 other states. Irrigation, a crucial element in increasing agricultural production, is highly advanced in Tamil Nadu. There has been a striking increase in the number of electrified pump sets. Tamil Nadu is the leading state in India in pump set irrigation.

The agricultural work force in Tamil Nadu has remained at about 67 percent of all workers. But a striking

shift as between cultivators and agricultural workers has taken place between 1961 and 1981. (See Table I). From a figure of 31 per cent in 1961, the figure of agricultural labourers has sharply risen to 52 percent in 1981. In absolute numbers the increase was from about 28 lakhs to about 59 lakhs. Thus, while there has been no reduction in the proportion of those engaged in agriculture, a large shift has occurred from cultivation to wage within the agricultural workforce. The factors behind this shift have been demographic growth, resumption of tenancies, debt and distress leading to loss of land on the part of small peasants, rural non-agricultural workers such as craftsmen and weavers shifting to coolie work on land as well as greater demand for labour arising from increased irrigation, higher agricultural output, and spread of the new technology.

In terms of the broad picture of growth, the long term growth rate in Tamil Nadu has continued to be low, despite a turn for the better in the 70's. Many areas of the state notably eastern Ramanathapuram and Dhamapuri remain backward both in terms of industry and agriculture.

In terms of inequalities there is an extreme concentration of land and other assets in Tamil Nadu. Table II, presents the ownership distribution of land in 1971-72 as brought out in the 26th Round of the NSS. It shows that among those who own land, marginal farmer households owning upto 2.5 acres constitute 78.4 per cent while the extent of land

that they own is only 20.2 per cent of the total. Small and marginal farmer households owning upto 5 acres constitute 89.8 per cent of households but account for only 42.1 per cent of land owned. The remaining about 10 per cent of households with 5 acres or more own as much as about 58 per cent of land. The estimates in the 26th Round of the NSS also show that among all the States in India Tamil Nadu had the highest percentage in 1971-72 of rural households not owning any land at all (17.01 per cent) as also of those who neither owned nor operated any land (14.09 per cent).

Information from the RBI's All-India Debt and Investment Survey 1971-72 on the distribution among rural households of all assets including not only land but also such items as buildings, livestock, farm and non-farm equipment, durable consumables and financial assets. Table III shows that the top 10 per cent of rural households own about 78 per cent of assets. Within them, the top one per cent owned about 38 per cent of assets i.e., more than the assets owned by the bottom 95 per cent taken together.

On the land reforms front, in 1960, land ceiling legislation was introduced fixing the ceiling at 30 standard acres. In 1970, the ceiling was reduced to 15 standard acres. In the 1960s, when land ceilings were originally imposed, the potential surplus was officially estimated at 25.5 lakh acres at a ceiling of 10 standard acres. However, up to the end of 1981, only 1.37 lakh acres have been notified as surplus of

which 1.01 lakh acres have been so far distributed. Clearly, many large landlords have been able to evade the ceiling legislation through partitions and benami transactions. Unlike as in some other States (notably, W. Bengal and Karnataka), Tamil Nadu has not brought forward legislation to enable tenant tillers to own leased land. Nor has there been adequate implementation of legislation assuring tenants of security and fair rents. No attempt has been made to bring about consolidation of land-holdings despite States like Punjab, Haryana and Uttar Pradesh having shown the way.

On poverty, table IV gives the position of Tamil Nadu vis-a-vis the all-India level and the rank of Tamil Nadu from the poorest and of the list of 14 major states for which estimates are available. The table shows that although the rural poverty proportion has fluctuated in Tamil Nadu from year to year because of variations in seasonal conditions, consistently Tamil Nadu has remained among the States in India with a very high poverty proportion.

In regard to "who are the poor", an estimate for Tamil Nadu in 1970-71 is that 56 per cent of cultivators consisting of those operating a hectare of wet land or three hectares of dry land, 87 per cent of agricultural labourers, and about 85 per cent of agricultural labourers, and about 85 per cent of non-agricultural rural labourers would come under the poverty line.<sup>35</sup> The bulk of the latter would be handloom weavers, other rural artisans, construction workers, fishermen, and destitutes and old people without occupation.



A very high proportion of agricultural labourers are among the absolutely poor and, there has been a very large increase in their numbers in Tamil Nadu in the last two decades. It is therefore of particular interest to know whether their condition has improved. An agricultural labourer derives his or her earnings mainly from wage employment. As such, his (or her) level of annual earnings will depend mainly on the number of days in the year for which employment is available and the average daily wage level. Trends in these two parameters will have to be analysed with reference to price increases so that it would be possible to obtain an idea of the change in real terms. There is no hard data in regard to the growth in the availability of employment to agricultural labourers. Village studies suggest that factors have operated both to increase employment as well as to offset such increases.<sup>36</sup> Greater output arising from the use of improved seeds and chemical inputs, higher intensity of cropping, more irrigation and crop diversification would have led to greater labour absorption in agriculture. Growth in non-agricultural activities and in government services have resulted in some shift of agricultural labour to non-agricultural rural activities. On the other hand, mechanisation, particularly the use of tractors, has displaced employment. On the supply side, there has been an increase of about 24 per cent in the agricultural work force as a whole in 1961-81 and an increase of 110 per cent in the number of

agricultural labourers. In the result, it seems that any increase in the duration of employment is not likely to have been significant.<sup>37</sup>

In regard to wages, trends vary in different regions of the State but aggregate data indicates that in real terms wages have fallen between 1951-52 and 1973-74. Discounting money wages by the prices of rice II sort, Kurian finds that in real terms, the average daily wage for men field labourers in 1973-74 was 71 per cent of its level in 1951-52 with the corresponding ratio being about 76 per cent for women.<sup>38</sup>

Again in regions where real wages have increased, duration of employment may have gone up to a relatively lesser extent so that total real earnings would show no significant increase. There is little doubt that despite such growth that Tamil Nadu has had, a large proportion of agricultural labourer household most marginal farmers and many small farmer and rural non-agricultural households remain under the poverty line.

In regard to quality of life comprising aspects such as literacy, wealth and nutrition, the Scheduled Castes occupy a very disadvantaged position. In addition to their low literacy, in villages, they have very poor access to basic amenities such as drinking water supply, health facilities, house sites, housing and electricity. About 82 percent of the Scheduled Caste workers in 1971 were engaged in agriculture, of whom 78 percent were agricultural labourers belonging to the poorest segment of the population.

Several village studies<sup>39</sup> are available in respect of Tamil Nadu. Some of the findings are of interest.<sup>40</sup>

The villages studied show a pattern of emergence of demographic stability arising from common factors such as the decline in mortality rates with improvements in health care services, agricultural modernisation leading to increases in crop yields and the growth of industrial activity.

Vadamalaipuram village in the relatively backward district of Ramanathapuram,<sup>41</sup> has seen considerable economic growth and modernisation, but no significant improvement in the standards of living of the mass of the population. Through all the changes that have occurred the bigger landowners have kept their position intact and have even enriched themselves. These changes have occurred within the context of a prior distribution of the ownership of means of production and on the basis of the rules of the game that protect and reinforce the ownership structure. State intervention has not only respected the rules of the game but often actively intervened on behalf of the economically and socially dominant stratum. The process of modernisation has led to a breakdown of social consensus and social cohesion imposed by the dominant landed gentry. While some of the more crude forms of caste oppression have been eliminated, this process is far from complete and has been resisted by the Naidu landlords. More disturbingly, the village youth, many of them educated, displayed the persistence of caste ideology. While

land distribution has been highly unequal throughout the period of the different surveys, the modernisation of agriculture between 1958 and 1983 has led to a marginal increase in the degree of concentration of land and other assets. Real wages for agricultural labour have hardly increased between 1916 and 1983. The per capita annual income of households solely dependent on agricultural labour is around Rs. 740, well below the poverty line in 1983. The significant employment of Pallars (a Harijan caste) in the local mill and their exposure to union activity has led them to assert their democratic rights. Especially the youth among them, are far less subservient than their elders to the dominant land owners belonging to Naidu and Konar castes. However, quite a few Pallars serve as pannaiyals (field serfs) to Naidu landlords and are subjected to various forms of discrimination. The continued near total dependence of the Chakkiliars (another Harijan sub-caste) on agricultural labour for a livelihood makes them entirely dependent on landlords. Even today, they continue to serve as 'pagadai' and must observe the traditional norms of subservience to caste Hindu landlords.

In the case of Dusi village (North Arcot District) the authors observe<sup>42</sup> that while the village has witnessed transformation and growth, there is no hard evidence on the extent to which the process might have resulted in a reduction of poverty. Given the present levels of poverty among agricultural, non-agricultural and weaving households of the

order of over 60 per cent or more, any improvement in trend over time "offers little practical consolation". The new technology of HYV's, chemical fertilisers and pesticides which has spread since the 1960's has been a factor in raising crop productivity and in improving the intensity of cropping. Land under tenancy, very high in 1916 (over 70 percent) has sharply declined (23 per cent). This is explicable in terms of passage of ownership from non-cultivating Brahmin landlords to self-cultivating peasants and the resumption of tenancies following tenancy legislation in 1950's. Many of the tenant families of 1916-37 have joined the ranks of landless

agricultural labour. Despite the emergence of weaving as a major supplementary source of livelihood, the members of agricultural labourers have gone up. Even with some supplementary income from casual labour in Kancheepuram, agricultural labour household are well below the poverty line. So are craftsmen and most marginal cultivators.

In respect of Gangaikondan village (Tirunelveli district) the author observes<sup>43</sup> that the overall picture that emerges is one of a process of slow modernisation in agriculture, accompanied by the disappearance of absentee landlordism. Productive forces have advanced in both agriculture and industry but the benefits of the process of development have not been distributed widely and evenly. The distribution of assets and families of 1916-37 have joined the ranks of landless. the economic rules of the game serve to reinforce inequality. Demographic pressure and the decline in cropped area have



contributed to a large increase in the number of agricultural

labourers. The presence of a considerable surplus of labour has helped prevent a rapid rise in wage levels both in agriculture, and in non-agricultural activities. Changes have occurred and commercialisation of the economy has proceeded apace, but the working people of the village have not been the chief beneficiaries. Nevertheless, their lives are changing and with it their perceptions as well.

### III

There is a view among scholars<sup>44</sup> that poverty eradication and social justice have not been the core of India's development policy since Independence. Agricultural policy since Independence, supported by powerful domestic interests including rich farmers and industrial entrepreneurs has been geared to maximising short run growth of commodity production at the cost of increasing the disparity between the richer and poorer farmers and that between advanced regions and backward regions. Rudra cites<sup>45</sup> Ladejinski, one

of the experts closely associated over a long time with the formulation and implementation of the agricultural policy: "The aim of the Green Revolution as envisioned by the policy makers is productivity; social imperatives were not part of it". He sees the following major changes in the evolution of developmental policy with regard to agriculture: (i) a shift in emphasis from rural development as a whole to growth of

agricultural production taken narrowly; (ii) a shift in emphasis from institutional reform to reliance on the potency of technology; and (iii) the dropping of the ideology of co-operatives and its replacement by the ideology of individual self-seeking.

Guhan observes<sup>46</sup> that poverty alleviation has been an adjunct rather than the core of the developmental policy. It is not the precise quantum of growth but its sources, pattern and spread that will be crucial for rural poverty alleviation. This means a review and reorientation of a wide array of social and macroeconomic policies relating to production and consumption, fiscal policies in regard to taxes, subsidies and expenditure priorities, policies relating to employment, mechanisation and technology, policies for the development of backward regions and for redressing the condition of socially disadvantaged groups and so on, with poverty alleviation as the prime purpose of development. Resource mobilisation and efficiency in its use, employment promotion and better regional balance will be of central importance. Direct measures of poverty eradication will also be necessary given the nature, magnitude and persistence of the problem.

Ahtreya observes<sup>47</sup> that the aim of state policy in the field of agriculture has been to promote capitalism by providing incentives to the large farmers and erstwhile feudal landlords in the form of subsidized inputs and

infrastructure (especially irrigation). The thrust of Zamindari abolition, tenancy reform and land ceilings has been to create a class of farmers, mainly landlords, and rich peasants, who would adopt modern farming practices, produce for the market and help raise the productivity of labour in agriculture so as to facilitate industrial expansion by making available increased supplies for wage goods and raw materials. Such a thrust has led to considerable land alienation and a large increase in the number of agricultural labourers. The policy of development based on a narrow base consisting mainly of large industrial groups, foreign monopoly capitalists and big landlords has failed to provide a growing home market. This has resulted from the failure to break the stranglehold of semi-feudal relations in agriculture, exemplified by rack-renting, usury, mercantile exploitation and various forms of extra-economic coercion.

In regard to land reforms, for example, the surplus land available for redistribution was estimated at 8.6 m hectares in the late 70's. Against this, the area actually declared surplus is 1.8 m hectares, area taken possession of is 1.2m hectares and the area finally distributed is 0.9m hectares i.e. about one tenth of the potential surplus. Similarly, tenancy reform intended to provide greater tenurial security to tenants has had the perverse effect of resumption of rented land by landlords and concealed informal tenancies, particularly in areas of rapid agricultural growth. It is not



surprising, therefore, that landholding surveys show that there has been no marked change in 1961-71 in the degree of inequality in distribution of land (owned and operated) in most parts of India, while in Punjab and Haryana the inequality in operational holdings has increased. Taking land and other assets together, the distribution of wealth in rural India has become more unequal in the same period: the top 10 percent of rural households commanded more than half and the bottom 10 per cent only 0.1 per cent of the total stock of rural assests, both at the beginning and end of the 1960s.

Three broad sets of issues,<sup>49</sup> structural, financial and institutional have been identified in relation to "direct" programmes of poverty alleviation. Given the systematic inequalities of land and asset ownership, benefits from these programmes have tended to be appropriated by the non-poor.

Second, the scale of resources allocated to these programmes though not insignificant have not been anywhere near adequate given the magnitude of the poverty problem. Third, the overwhelming reliance on the bureaucracy for the implementation of these programmes has led to inefficiency, waste and corruption.

Similar has been the record in respect of "basic minimum needs" such as education, health, water, sanitation and so on.<sup>50</sup> First, policy has not been diverted specifically or in a sustained fashion towards meeting these needs in rural areas or with respect to disadvantaged sections or at primary

levels of deprivation. Second, in a federal structure, with the state Government having the responsibility for education, health, nutrition, water supply and sanitation, administrative capabilities as well as resources allocated and effectively expended have varied widely. Third, the critical minimum effort, in terms of intersectoral coordination to tackle inter-related problems such as disease, illiteracy, malnutrition etc. has been lacking. Fourth, given their low income, the ability of the poor to benefit from these programmes has been limited. Finally, decentralised participatory arrangements essential for effective implementation of programmes have not been encouraged and have even been opposed in many states.

The foregoing observations in relation to the all-India picture are essential for understanding the status and impact poverty eradication programmes in Tamil Nadu. The administration of these programmes are controlled and guided by the Department of Rural Development in the Union Government and deviations are almost impermissible in respect of any particular aspect of the programmes or the strategy.

A recent study<sup>51</sup> of the trends and policy in regard to state finances in Tamil Nadu shows that what could be referred to as the 'agricultural lobby' has been consistently successful in perpetuating or obtaining low taxes, low water charges, highly concessional power tariffs, subsidies on agricultural inputs, loan write offs and in edging up paddy

procurement prices. The rapid growth of pumpset irrigation from about the mid-60's enabled by the impetus given to rural electrification in the period of Congress rule, have added economic strength to affluent paddy and cash crop farmers who are already socially and politically powerful in their local areas. For large, medium and small farmers alike, demand for low tariffs, low taxes and higher subsidies have provided a rallying platform. The accommodation of these demands have fuelled further claims. At the same time, the regional parties have sought to undermine their traditional political rival, the Congress party by downgrading local institutions such as the cooperatives, Panchayat Unions and Panchayats, which has been the traditional power base of the latter. This has centralised the bureaucracy and has politicised it from above and through the ruling party cadres in local areas. The absence of accountability has contributed to increasing bureaucratic corruption at the grass roots level. The undermining of local level institutions has diverted the energies of the rural elites from participatory into agitational channel.<sup>52</sup> The over all fiscal and budgetary scene in the state is characterised by evasion of revenues, leakages from government programmes and projects, wasteful and ostentatious expenditures and inefficiencies in investment, maintenance and operations. An underlying cause may be the phenomenon of political and bureaucratic corruption which has emerged as a major problem in Tamil Nadu in the last decade.<sup>53</sup> Guhan concludes that partisan politics and competitive populism

between two regional political formations has led to the vulnerability of the state Government to various pressure groups - farmers, government employees, teachers, traders, bus and cinema operators, the urban middle class and so on. (The rural poverty groups are, of course, outside the various pressure groups which is one of the major issues in public policy). The resulting failure of long term planning, a long term fiscal policy based on equity, efficiency and economy and of fiscal discipline in general is, of course, not confined to Tamil Nadu but is a much more generalised phenomenon.<sup>54</sup>

The data emerging from field level investigations on certain aspects of the machinery of development administration and the impact of some of the major development programmes reveal interesting features.

A study on agriculture and social structure in Tamil Nadu brought out sociological insights into the twin aspects of development mentioned above.<sup>55</sup> The author shows the crucial importance of the social structure in influencing the development process. The policies of the agricultural administration show a clear relationship to the middle class orientation of its members, and to their tendency to identify with the upper stratum in the rural areas. The strategies chosen, even in agronomic matters are strongly influenced, both by the socio-economic organisation on the village, regional and state levels and by the structure of relations and

attitudes within the development bureaucracy. The present structures are not calculated to break down barriers between people nor to eliminate the great disparities in society by providing for adequate employment opportunities as well as adequate food for all. The question of power relations as they affect and are affected by the so called modernisation process appear crucial.

Apart from the urban bias of the district administrative machinery for rural development<sup>56</sup> this machinery also suffers from comparison with the district administrative machinery for collection of revenue. More than three decades after Independence, the revenue collection grid established by the British is still the leading pattern of space subdivision. The leading district officer is still called the collector "as if the main task of administration is still officially acknowledged as being the transfer of the taxes to the Madras Treasury".<sup>57</sup> Detailed study of the rural development set up and the revenue set up in a typical district of the state showed that at the medium level in the district the revenue set up had a two tier grid (Talukus and Pkikas) while the rural development set up had only one (the development block). At the grass roots level the contrast was even stronger.<sup>58</sup>

The assumption appears to be that those in authority believe that rural development does not deserve more men and a more efficient grid matching at least that of the revenue set up. A similar urban bias is revealed when one examines

the dynamics of rural change involved in the establishment of the grid of the regulated markets or the network of bank branches.

After observing that the rural development bureaucracy is not receiving from the state the remodelled network which could help it to carry out its duties, the author we have cited above, states that "the nodes of a more efficient grid do already exist". The efficient implementation of the Noon Meal Programme is a good example of how to go about the matter but this is a programme with "no risk of social tension", in addition to being a good vote catcher device.

The problem however, requires further analysis in the context of the social content of the rural development programmes, the social framework in which they are implemented, and the social feedback received from the villages by the state power.

The emasculation of the Panchayati Raj set up which per se is a very good mechanism for conveying the grievances and suggestions of the rural weaker sections to the policy makers had resulted in the BDO becoming both "the judge and the judged" in relation to these programmes. The experience in West Bengal has shown that elected local bodies, particularly Gram Panchayats and Panchayat Samitis have the potential, given requisite social and political preconditions, to break the traditional subservience linking the development and administrative bureaucracy to the powerful rural landed elite.

In the Tamil Nadu context, the ease with which over the years the government has held itself apart from the panchayat system can only be interpreted as a sign of its reluctance to bring about radical change in the countryside.

The eclipse of the Panchayat system compels the rural population to convey its grievances to the urban decision makers through spontaneous agitations for long due amenities or rely upon organised protest. The mechanism of MLA's and MP's is limited by the fact that they depend on state and national level decision makers for their very nomination as MLA's and MP's.

Studies on the relations between the local political representatives and the development bureaucracy<sup>59</sup> underline the different, even antagonistic backgrounds of the leading IAS administrators and those of most of the MLA's. The differences at the Block level are not so wide but the uneven balance of power visible at the higher levels is more pronounced. The larger jurisdictional control of the MLA's and MP's, the privileges and rights bestowed upon them, their direct, quicker and easier access to state level political power centres leads to the relative instability of the administrative machinery, its subservience to the politicising game and shapes the actual background to the implementation of the rural development programmes. Thus results the well-observed collusion between the political strong man and the administration.

Several factors have led to the emergence of a new consciousness which is slowly transforming the social fabric of the villages.<sup>60</sup> The rural development policy itself and the spreading politicisation of the rural masses are the prime factors.

three

Racine distinguishes 3 main phases in the general policies aimed at rural change in India.<sup>61</sup> The fifties, and a good part of the sixties, were the time of "Community Development" with emphasis given to the uplifting of the rural population as a whole. In the late sixties and in the seventies, the emphasis was shifted to agricultural growth and increased in production: the "green revolution" was supposed to benefit first the enterprising farmers, but also, ultimately the whole rural classes. Neither Community Development nor the "green revolution" succeeded in pushing the masses above the poverty line. Hence the approach selected for the eighties, with a twin emphasis on productivity on the one hand and alleviation of rural poverty on the other. Phase II has resulted in an increase in the weight of an expanded class of medium-sized dynamic farmers (to the cost of those who could not match them and lost their land). In Tamilnadu, this class, on the whole, was largely sympathetic to the Dravidian movement. Phase I of yesteryear did multiply physical projects, but failed to eradicate poverty. Phase III today may very well meet the same fate. "Gari bi hatao" might be a piece of rhetoric. But rhetoric is also a factor in



change, and if the results of the development policies did not come up to official expectations, they did however promote some decisive changes in the mentality of the villagers, whose perceptions of the town, of the urban power and of the rural relays of the urban power are noticeably transformed".

Further, up to and including the fifties most villagers were rather subdued when facing the administration: for them submission to the goodwill of the bureaucrats was more or less of a rule. When the Community Development programme was really under way in Tamilnad, in the sixties, information on policies and projects circulated from town to countryside and upliftment was presented as the official aim of the governments in power, in New Delhi as well as in Madras. "Upliftment" (Munnetra) was also the key word for a young and very active party, the Dravida Munnetra Kalagam, and DMK propaganda contributed largely to a fresh awakening of the backward classes, and the lower forward classes, which account for the majority of the rural population. This conjunction between national goals and regional politics brought a change: facing the development bureaucracy, these classes of small and low medium peasants, knowing that urban rhetoric was now on their side, abandoned their age old submission, and started to request bureaucrats to act for them, and not only for those with traditional power and connections. Finally, after the DMK and the AIADMK came to power, their populist stands masked somewhat the selective tendencies of the green revolution

strategy. Politicization, more than ever, percolated everywhere, electoral promises and electoral campaigning aroused in many a feeling that after all, their voices counted, and that something was due to them, a reasoning further strengthened by the present emphasis on the weaker sections manifested in the Integrated Rural Development Programme. On the one hand, the movements having affected the Backward classes in the sixties gained momentum and spread over the Scheduled Castes, whose submissiveness diminished and whose demands were expressed in a stronger voice. On the other hand, and going a step further, the rural development bureaucrats were (and are now) faced with a new segment of villagers, who not only ask to have things done, but also tend to order them, and even to shrewdly threaten them.<sup>62</sup>

A study on the working of the Small Farmer Development Agency at the village level<sup>63</sup> reaches the conclusion that the experience of the SFDA in Varandur (Coimbatore district) between 1975 and 1980 suggests that the internal contradictions in the programme are such as to make it impossible for it to achieve the goals set out for it.

Also available is a detailed evaluation of the impact of the Drought Prone Area Programme (DPAP) the Small Farmers Development Agency (SFDA), the Integrated Rural Development Programme (IRDP) and so on in respect Ramanathapuram and Dharmapuri districts, two of the most backward districts in the state in terms of agro-climatic conditions and general economic development.<sup>64</sup>

The main thrust of the evaluation was to find out how the major schemes were being implemented in the field, how relevant were they to development in the related sector, and to what extent they served to promote the objective of area development in the specific circumstances of the district. In regard to the household and beneficiary-oriented IRDP schemes, the attempt was to assess the impact through Village-level household enquiries. In this way, the essential modus operandi of the evaluation was to assess both "implementation" and "impact" in an inter-related way by talking to both the administrators and to those at whom "administration" was aimed.

Briefly, the report arrived at the following general conclusions in relation to the IRDP:

- i) In terms of financial allocation for the subsidy element, keeping in view the number of persons in the "target-group" per Block, the IRDP was a fairly thin programme.
- ii) In the actual provision of subsidies, the small and marginal farmers were relatively favoured vis-a-vis the third and the least privileged category in the target group viz., agricultural labourers.
- iii) Nor was there an even or an equitable geographical spread in the implementation of the programme.
- iv) The guidelines had been breached in more than one respect in the actual identification of beneficiaries.
- v) Negligence and administrative inefficiency were only one set of the reasons for such wrong identification. There was certainly also corruption.

vi) Another important finding that reflected on the overall implementation of the scheme was that the government sanction was available quite late in the financial year and the Credit Plan was finalised only after that. There was much variation between the Credit Plan and the lending pattern that was actually implemented.

vii) As a result of a number of factors, the indebtedness of the poorer beneficiaries actually increased because they were extended "benefits" under IRDP.

The report further mentioned three main conclusions. First, that the state and structure of poverty themselves blunt the dents that are sought to be made through the IRDP type schemes. Second, that the type of scheme, the scale of subsidy, and the terms of lending need to be more flexibly and closely aligned to the realistic returns that can be expected from each scheme and the economic status of different groups of beneficiaries. Third, it is of vital importance that the IRDP is underpinned by effective programmes for providing infrastructural support facilities.

In respect of planning and implementation the following points were made:-

- (i) The strongest concern noticed at all levels of the administration was for the achievement of financial targets.
- (ii) Officials were dedicated and hardworking but indifferent to the ultimate results.

(iii) No empirical basis has been built up for ex-ante evaluation of programmes, even if there were to be interest in undertaking such evaluation; no thrust for reducing costs for achieving given returns; or for maximising returns for a given cost.

(iv) In this context, the need for district level planning asserted itself.

(v) Instructions and guidelines issued by the Government of India on several aspects of planning and implementation (a) had not been disseminated to operational levels; (b) were too general and abstract for field officials to understand and follow; (c) the technical expertise and levels of economic analysis for plan formulation were not available nor made available at the district level.

(vi) There was evidence of corruption, inefficiency and waste, and of lack of coordination, to cause concern. Obviously, DPAP and IRDP programmes are not likely to be administered any better than other 'normal' programmes. The overall reform of the administrative machinery at the field level (and at higher levels) is crucial to the success of district planning exercises and honest administration. While it is necessary, within the existing framework of DPAP to promote such reforms, it might be a mistake to assume that such reforms can in themselves secure the basic objectives of rural development.

- (vii) Most DPAP and IRDP schemes were capable of being effectively implemented only on the basis of village-level decisions and village-level cooperation.
- (viii) The ruling approach in DPAP and IRDP is for the official machinery, primarily through the block development administration to attempt some of the tasks which entail peoples' participation at the village-level.
- (ix) Experience has shown that local institutions, by themselves, do not change the local power structure. On the other hand, they have often confirmed and strengthened this caste-and-class based structure by reflecting and institutionalising it.
- (x) In this context, the DPAP/IRDP approach seems to harbour a fundamental flaw in that it seeks to provide supplementary-income creating assets (such as milch cattle) in an environment where the redistribution of the primary-income creating asset (viz., land) has been allowed to recede to the background. Land reform has made little headway in the districts of Tamil Nadu.

#### IV

The various incidents of agrarian tension and police repression in the districts <sup>64A</sup> of North Arcot and Dharmapuri during 1980 show that the rural poor consisting mainly of agricultural labourers, small and marginal farmers, artisans and so on were clearly responding to the impact of political

processes and asserting their rights in terms of the existing legal provisions. Demands for the payment of minimum wages, protection of civil rights, implementation of land reforms legislations, stoppage of atrocities and crimes, abolition of bonded labour and usurious practices and so on were at the heart of the series of violent incidents reported in the two districts throughout the 70's; they reached a crescendo during August-September 1980. The failure or inability of the administrative machinery <sup>to</sup> make available to the rural poor (and ensure that they are availed of by them) the various rights contained in the 20 - Point Programme was clearly the main factor behind the disillusionment of the rural poor and their turning to the leadership provided by the radical activists in the region.

These incidents <sup>65</sup> make it clear that it is the existence of extremes of social inequality, exploitation and injustice in these backward districts that were responsible for the growth of radical sentiments among the rural poor (given shape to by the so-called naxalite activists).

Factors such as the nature of the terrain in the region, its location in the tri-junction between Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka, the easy transmission of extremist influence into Tamil Nadu from the border areas of Andhra Pradesh and so on, often stated in official and other reports appear to be incidental rather than central to the unrest.

Agrarian tensions,<sup>66</sup> as manifested in the so called Naxalite activities, first came on surface in the two districts in the wake of a drought during 1970-72. Throughout the '70's the situation remained serious with many cases of rural violence arising out of agrarian discontent. This was also the period of mass radicalisation of the rural poor as a result of the 'Garibi Hatao' call of the ruling party in the early 70's followed by the 20-Point Programme of the Emergency. Press reports on the happenings in the rural areas of these districts show that the rural poor had been radicalised and were demanding payment of minimum wages, abolition of bonded labour, enforcement of civil rights, stoppage of crimes and atrocities against the rural poor, effective implementation of land reforms, welfare programmes and so on. The administration in the two backward districts could not for various reasons respond to the call of the Central Government for the effective enforcement of these just demands.<sup>67</sup> On the other hand, the police were allowed a free hand, to deal as they liked with rural protest centring on genuine human social and legal rights.

The seriousness of the agrarian tensions in the two districts was brought to light with an incident on August 6, 1980 at Ramnagar near Tirupathur in North Arcot district in which, in a bomb blast some policemen and a few so-called 'Naxalites' (radical rural activists fighting for the cause of the rural poor) were killed.



According to the government version (based on police reports) inspector Palaniswamy and five policemen including a driver, went to the Elagiri Hills to arrest Perumal, the main accused in the murder of a landlord of Kadirampatti village. The police party encountered Perumal and four others - Sivalingam, Rajappa, Selvam and Chinnathampi all of whom were "wanted" in several other cases. The police seized knives and other arms from them, bundled them into their car and rushed to the Tirupathur police station as it grew dark. In their hurry, the police did not search the person of Sivalingam, who managed to conceal a bomb. He exploded it in the car. When the driver stopped the vehicle, he made good his escape, as also Chinnathampi. Two policemen and Selvam were killed in the blast. The inspector died while being taken to the Vellore hospital. Perumal and Rajappa were caught and taken to the Tirupathur hospital where Perumal was pronounced dead. Rajappa died soon after.

The official story bristled with contradictions. How can an Ambassador car accommodate 11 adults (eight of them squeezed in the rear seat and the leg space)? Where the police ignorant of the identity of Sivalingam, already a top leader of the Naxalite movement in North Arcot?

A different version of the incident was pieced together by two pressmen after interviewing the local people. According to this, Sivalingam and Chinnathampi were nowhere in the picture. The police party arrested one Naxalite

(apparently Perumal) and two others, who had given shelter to him. These three were bundled into the leg space with their hands tied behind them; three policemen sitting on the rear seats had their feet planted on the prisoners. The bomb must have been seized from them or from somebody else and kept as evidence by the Inspector, who sat on the extreme left in the front seat with another policeman between him and the driver. The bomb must have gone off accidentally. The Inspector, the policeman by his side, Selvam, who was cooped up in the leg space immediately behind and the policeman sitting over him, all received fatal injuries. Perumal and Rajappa were taken to the Tirupathur hospital hours after the incident, dead or nearly dead, presumably after interrogation involving the "third degree".

Following the incident, a massive "combing operation" was launched by the State police in the two districts to root out Naxalite activities. The neighbouring states of Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka were also alerted. Very little information was forthcoming from the official side on the depth and doings of the "Naxalites" in the two districts. But bits gathered from several sources gave a bazy but composite picture.

Though the strength of the Naxalites in Tamil Nadu was not precisely known an official estimate placed the figure around 2,000, the concentration being in the Dharmapuri and North Arcot districts. Both these districts have long ranges

of hilly tracts and scrub jungle affording a certain amount of protection and cover. In the latter part of the 60's. the western Coimbatore district was a scene of Naxalite activity but this area had now become quiet. The majority of the Naxalites were from the working class but some were educated unemployed youths.

The tactical line of the Naxalites was to garner sympathy from the poorest sections of the people, especially the Harijans. For example, Sivalingam was believed to have been given sanctuary and protection in the Harijan "cheris" (hamlets). Large-scale police operations in Harijan colonies would set off political repercussions, an inhibiting factor for the police.

In the prosperous rural town, Tirupattur, in North Arcot district, located at the foot of the Yelagiri Hills and in many villages in the contiguous Dhamapuri district, the Naxalites reportedly held sway. Individual village disputes and grievances were not taken to the courts in Tirupattur, Jolarpet and Vellore, the headquarters of North Arcot district. They were summarily settled on the spot and the decisions were accepted without protest by some landlords and money-lenders. An extremist "annihilation" group was also active against the "crimes" of "class enemies" like landlords and money-lenders. The killing of a landlord, Narayana Reddiar was a case in point. When the farm hands insisted on being paid the minimum wage fixed by the Government, Reddiar, (who was willing to pay

but was dissuaded by the village Panchayat Chief) brought cheap labour from outside with the help of the police by invoking his "civil right" for protection. The Naxalites bombed him to death in his own house. His wife, son and grandson were also killed because, according to witnesses, they refused to come out of the house as the Naxalites said they only wanted Reddiar's life. In another case, a money-lender was "persuaded" to give away the lands he had taken over from his debtors. One Natesa Nainar of Kadirampatti village, was killed on August 3 because he was the leader of the "vigilance squad" set up by the authorities.

A report said that the Tirupattur area of North Arcot district and the neighbouring areas in Dhamapuri district were in many ways different from the rest of Tamil Nadu. These pockets were among the most backward regions, and had mixed population speaking Tamil, Telugu, Kannada and Urdu. The non-Tamil-speaking sections were a neglected lot, and even the educated among them were unable to get jobs. Their grievances were not properly "understood" by the Tamil-speaking officialdom. The exploitation of the poor Harijans, and the marginal farmers by the landlords, also loan sharks, had resulted in the former losing their small holding and becoming bonded labourers. In this area, over a long period, a small minority had been lording it over a vast majority of the poor and illiterate landless despite the laws in the statute book. The breaking point was reached with the

militant younger elements taking to violence to secure speedy social and economic justice.

These areas impinged on a narrow neck of Andhra Pradesh's Chittoor district, a communist stronghold, which separated them from Karnataka's Kolar goldfields, another sensitive area. The tri-junction consisted of hill ranges, forests and scrub jungle. The Naxalites were "sheltered" by the people, in some cases willingly.

The growth of Naxalism in this area was explained by the political consciousness aroused by the "study cells" that sprang up in several places, particularly at Jolarpet, a big railway junction. The first railway loco-running staff union in the country was set up by one Sivalingam whom the Tamil Nadu police were looking for in connection with the August 6 bombing incident.

Sivalingam, one of the first diesel engine drivers of the railways, was initially a member of the Dravida Kazhagam. A trade unionist, Sivalingam took part in the 1974 railway strike. He was arrested later for a minor offence following an inter-village feud. Expecting to be released on his appeal to the high court, Sivalingam had refused to oblige the then ruling DMK to help set up its own railway workers' union. When the high court confirmed the conviction and sentence of one year in jail, Sivalingam jumped bail and joined the Naxalites. Many others like him were forced to join the movement for a variety of reasons like humiliation and

torture at the hands of high caste employers or because of trumped up police cases.

Voluntary organisations had started doing some work to wean away the Naxalites. A local lawyer had taken interest in the socio-economic problems of his town Tirupattur. He had succeeded in persuading some young Naxalites to give up violence and destruction of property. He blamed the growth of the Naxalites on what he called the social atrocities, and economic injustices perpetrated on the poverty-ridden majority by the small minority enjoying prosperity.

The activities of extremists found roots in Tirupattur and Vaniyambadi taluks of North Arcot, due to socio-economic factors. Leaders of the Naxalites established a base in this belt, covering Tirupattur, Vaniyambadi, Krishnagari and Barur areas of North Arcot and Dharmapuri districts. This belt, dependent on lift irrigation, mostly cultivated one main paddy crop followed by sugarcane, groundnut and cotton as the second cash crop. This pattern of cultivation resulted in large scale unemployment or underemployment of agricultural labourers who lived in poverty for long periods. This situation was exploited by well-to-do land owners who seldom showed a regard for the Minimum Wages Act.

A study of cultivation figures in Tirupattur taluk showed that out of the total extent of about 1.64 lakhs

acres of cultivated land, only about 13,344 acres were wet; the rest were dry lands. There were about 14,359 marginal farmers and about six thousand small farmers, from whom had emerged a new-class of money lenders. There were 10,607 landless agricultural labourers. The fact that in this taluk only 466 persons had applied for debt relief, indicated that the cooperatives did not function effectively. As for unemployment, out of a population of 2.54 lakhs in 1971 in the taluk about 1.54 lakhs were non-workers and about 5,600 persons had sought employment.

The magnitude of the problem could be seen from the fact that one Kasi, a post-graduate, was one of the 120 persons engaged under the Food-for-Work programme in Ponneri village near Elagiri. In Madanalli village near Tirupattur about 200 persons went daily to the Javadi hills to collect fuel wood for sale in nearby market. If checked, they had no alternative but to resort to crime. Such groups, under the garb of extremists, often threatened villagers and indulged in theft and dacoity.

While nearly 300 policemen were now combing the area, the district administration had started welfare programmes to wean away the unemployed youth from the influence of extremists. The Food-for-Work programme was intensified in affected villages and work on provision of link roads to all villages taken up. The General Manager of the District Industries Centre was touring the area to identify small

industries, which could be started with financial assistance from nationalised banks to provide employment to the educated unemployed. Houses were to be provided to landless Harijans under the rural housing programme. In the early Seventies, the naxalite leader, Charu Mazumdar had paid a visit a Hogenekkal on the Karnataka border and brought under his influence three teenagers from the two districts - Kannamani Tamilvanan and Tamilarasan all wanted by the police for murders and dacoities. The three organised "study classes" in the hilly terrain. Among those who attended, were Sivalingam and Chinnathambi claimed by the police to have escape during the bomb blast on August 6, Discussion with the villagers on the causes behind the violence led to factors like social oppression, feudalism, exploitation of small land-holders and farm labour by money lenders and atrocities by caste Hindus against Harijans and bonded labour in various forms.

A local lawyer and President of the Organisation for Civil and Democratic Rights stated that farm labour was paid Rs.3 per man and Rs.2 per woman as against Rs.7 and Rs.5 fixed by the Government. Social legislations remained on paper. Instead of taking steps to enforce the laws aimed at bettering the lot of farm labour, officialdom tried to obtain peace by using the police to put down the discontent among farm labour.



He felt that the Naxalites were growing with more unemployed young men in the villages joining them. The police was responsible for driving the young men into the arms of the extremists. When a murder was committed in a village, police swooped on all young men at the behest of vested interests. Gripped by the fear of the police these young men go into hiding. Then they are sucked into the "Naxalite" movement.

On bonded labour, many versions were given. One of them was the exploitation of small landholders by money-lenders who grabbed their land by giving loans at interest ranging from 200 to 300 per cent. In Madapalli village near Tirupattur, one villager had this to say "some landlords employ farm labour paying wages annually. Poor workers are forced to take a loan before the date of payment and heavy interest is charged. There is then nothing for him to claim as wages. On the other hand, he finds that he has to pay the landlord some amount and so he agrees to work again. Thus the vicious circle goes on and he remains indebted for ever".

Workers sometimes took loans to celebrate weddings and in a few years the interest multiplied and far exceeded the loan. Unable to repay, the workers were forced to work on the terms dictated by the landlords.

The grievances aired by some farm labourers at Mathur and Pochampalli villages, naxalite strongholds in Dharmapuri district, were different. They said that indebted

farm workers even pledged their teenage sons and daughters with the landlords to do household duties, graze cattle etc. They were bitter that untouchability was still practised in a virulent form in many hamlets and Harijans treated with contempt and disrespect. A small farmer in Nallampalli, six miles off Dhamapuri, stated that landlords molested Harijan women and denied work to those who insisted on fair wages.

An advocate in Dhamapuri, stated that atrocities against Harijans in surrounding villages were on the increase. The police always ignored complaints preferred by victims at the instance of landlords. Harijans were not allowed to draw water from the wells used by the caste Hindus. Abject poverty, unemployment and social oppression led to frustration and discontent among the farm labour. He said that landlords evicted tenants with the help of village officials like Tahsildars and Karnams in many cases.

During Emergency, a rural activist in Tirupattur rose against the treatment meted out to farm labour and championed their cause. The landlords organised thugs to deal with those they considered trouble makers. This led to hatred of landlords and the police backed the landlords. The discontent burst out with the double murder case of Koodapattu village near Tirupattur followed by other cases of murder, arson, dacoities and destruction of agricultural property. Those who dared to give evidence against the suspected were assaulted and threats were held out, thus setting off a reign of terror.

How did the extremists choose their targets?

Enquiries made at Kadiramanatti village, (near Tirupattur) where a landlord was killed on August 3, showed that they usually conducted an investigation based on complaints they received. Opulence or the extent of land owned was not the criterion; the decisive factors were "social atrocities" committed or "collusion" with the police. With Naxalite groups establishing a foothold among the landless poor, mostly Harijans and the official machinery identifying itself increasingly with the landed gentry mostly non-Brahmin upper castes, class and caste conflicts in the Tirupattur area assumed a new dimension. According to an activist, police methods were helping to swell the ranks of the Naxalites. In the wake of the alleged Naxalite blast on August 6, he said, about 500 young men from nearby villages were picked up by the police and tortured. He said the villagers rounded up in connection with alleged Naxalite activities and produced before courts in Tirupattur were granted bail often on condition that they remained available for questioning. Their friends and relatives were reluctant to provide them food or shelter for fear of police hostility. Circumstances forced them to jump bail and once they did that they were obliged to go into hiding. Some officials conceded that indiscriminate police action had helped the Naxalites. When police organised village "defence squads" with the help of some landlords, the organisers became marked men.

On a tour of villages in North Arcot and Dharmapuri districts, a press reporter was told that the leader of the so-called Naxalite violence was Pachaiappan an illiterate Harijan farm labourer who had revolted against the system. His main targets were cash crops like bananas, coconuts, and jasmine; and his slogan: "Do not plant cash crops; plant food crops".

The village Kadirampatti in Tirupattur taluk illustrated the conditions that helped the emergence of Naxalite activity. Here, 170 caste Hindu families kept 300 Harijan families in virtual bondage. The Harijans dared not walk the streets of Kadirampatti wearing a white dhoti or chappals. As against the minimum prescribed wage of Rs.7 for a farm worker (Rs.5 for a woman), the practice in this village was to engage Harijans for an annual payment of Rs.350 and two meals a day each which works out to less than a rupee a day. The "take home" wage was less than even this paltry sum.

When the Harijans resorted to crop cutting as a part of their strategy to get justice the landlords with the help of the authorities, organized "self-protection" Committees. Natesa Nainar who played a leading role in one such committee was murdered on the night of August 3. The police then combed the Elagiri hills for the assailants of Nainar and their prime suspect was pachaiappan.

The landlords in Tirupattur, Jolarpettai, Ponneri and Dharmapuri had holdings far in excess of the prescribed

ceiling under the Tamil Nadu Land Ceiling Act of 1960. Whatever be the political dispensation, they by passed the laws. No one dared raise a finger against the "zamindars", who had political clout. Further, most of the houses in the villages of the district are owned by the landlords. Thus, their writ ran through the villages. Moneylenders, despite the moratorium issued by the government, were after the poor people.

The death of Balan in Dhamapuri was example of how the police carry out murders of Naxalites. On September 7, he had called a public meeting in Dhamapuri under the auspices of a civil liberties organisation to protest against police atrocities. When the meeting was in progress van loads of police came and mercilessly beat up the conveners of the meeting. Some of the police went on to the stage and beat both the legs of Balan into pieces. He dies in a Madras hospital on September 12.

Balan has been the organiser of the Kuli Vivasayigal Sangam (Agricultural Labourers' Association) and Valibar Sangam (Youth's Association). The Kuli Vivasayigal Sangam was a front-organisations of the CPI(ML) and effectively intervened in village disputes. There had been some incidents in the area which the police traced to Balan's influence. The spurt in police activity was traced by a Naxalite sympathiser to the intervention of the Kuli Vivasayigal Sangam in disputes. There had been some incidents in the area which the police

traced by a Naxalite sympathiser to the intervention of the Kuli Vivasayigal Sangam in disputes involving two political leaders of the area. In one case, an evicted tenant was brought back to work on his land. In another, the tenant successfully refused to quit the land in spite of several threats from the landlord.

Sources close to the Naxalite leaders stated that the Naxalites were more sinned against than sinning. They blamed the situation largely on the police. It all started in 1977 with the beating to death of one Siralan in public at Athipallam in Kandival Taluk. The police had been on the lookout for Siralan in connection with the murder of a landlord in 1976 in Athikuppan. Siralan was caught and died in police custody. An official inquiry into the Siralan incident absolved the police. Subsequently, Chakravarthi one of the five who had demanded the inquiry was hacked to death in an open field. In retaliation, Kesava Reddiar (thought to be behind the incident) was murdered.

Until an effective solution was found to the problems of poverty, unemployment and exploitation confronting the people the "naxalite" activities could not be curbed. This was the impression of F. Nedumaran, a prominent leader of the Congress <sup>68</sup> Nedumaran alleged that landlords, with the help of the local police were exploiting agricultural workers most of whom were Harijans. Kept as bonded labour, men workers were paid Rs.3 a day and women workers as Rs.1050 to Rs.2.

In most of the 100 villages he had visited landlords had let-loose "a reign of terror" Nedumaran said. Those who opposed them and fought for the cause of workers and the poor were branded naxalites and hunted by the police. At the same time, he said the anti-social elements who actually indulged in looting and murder had not been apprehended by the police.

Nedumaran said that after his meeting with a number of persons including the police and some of the 'underground naxalites' he was convinced that the problem was mainly socio-economic. The remedy lay in the Government taking urgent steps to improve the lot of Harijans and the poor who constituted the majority in the area. Among the measures he suggested were strict implementation of the farm wages laws, extension of the "self-sufficiency Scheme" to all the 16 panchayat unions in the district, better implementation of the food for work programme, and starting of a number of dairy cooperatives, particularly to benefit Harijan families.

Another report said that a dangerous trend is the growing ill-will between caste Hindus and Harijans, arising out of the feeling that naxalites had their roots in Harijan colonies.

The 'Q' branch of Police had been making a study of the growing naxalite problem in this area from early seventies. But till the triple murder case at Pommeri-village, the local police were inclined to treat incidents like destruction of crops, robbery and raid in villages etc. as arising out of

family disputes, properly quarrels and so on. The police had become lethargic in Tirupattur area as a sequel to the 1977 enquiry into the death of Seeralan.

In one village in Agaram revenue firka, Harijans had been barred from drawing water from irrigation wells. A compromise was reached when caste Hindus found they could not carry on their normal household and farm work without Harijan labourers. G. Masilamani of Vengarapuram village said that for about a fortnight (after the police hunt for naxalites began) Harijans were refused work in his village. Even bullock-carts were barred entry in the caste Hindu areas. Some caste-Hindus felt that hard-core naxalite elements belonging to the Harijan community were still at large mainly because of the protection given to them in Harijan colonies. C. Sounderajan, a Harijan youth who had completed his S.S.L.C. could not get a job even as a casual worker in a tannery because he came from Pommeri village affected by naxalite activity. He worked as a casual labourer under the Food for Work Programme.

In Madapalli and Madavalam villages Harijan youths lived under the constant fear of police action. A village officer in Madavalam village said that during his pilgrimage to Palani he was denied accommodation in hotels because he came from a 'naxalite' area.

Another aspect of the economic plight of the people was the problem small farmers faced. Most money lenders had



stopped giving credit to small landholders following the Debt Relief Act. Cooperatives had not filled the vacuum.

G. Krishna Reddy had about four acres of land and had not enjoyed any of the benefits announced for small farmers. He and some others felt that it would be difficult for them to secure an income certificate (as required under the Debt Relief Act) from the Revenue Department, because of the influence money-lenders had with government machinery.

"We do not stir out of our houses after sunset. The second show in the touring theatres do not get crowds. A large number of people have been unceremoniously taken to the police station just on suspicion that they may have close contact with the naxalites". This was what villagers in Papanur, Keezhkuppam, Barur, Arasampatti, Pochampalli, Puliyampatti, Naidhenkottai told a press reporter. Two persons going for a marriage, a school teacher who has been a Homeguards volunteer and a number of illiterate villagers going to attend their personal work after 8 in the night had been taken to the police station. All of them could establish their identity and could get respectable villagers to testify<sup>to</sup> their innocence. But they were released only the next morning. Many villagers suggested that while only the rich and the landed gentry had to be afraid of the naxalites, everyone including the majority of the law abiding citizens had to be afraid of the policeman.

A police official said<sup>70</sup> that by November 1980, the "sting" of the Naxalite movement in Tamil Nadu appeared to

have been taken out following the combing operations launched by the State Police during the past three months. "Operation Ajanta" named after the daughter of inspector Palanisamy who died in a bomb blast on August 3, had resulted in the arrest of over 100 Naxalites 25 of them belonging the "hard core" group, from the "Naxalite-infested" districts of Dhamapuri and North Arcot. The police shot dead three top Naxalites - Subramaniam, Kuruvikaran Kanakaraj and Shammugam - in violent encounters. Another Naxalite leader, Balan, succumbed to multiple injuries sustained during an encounter with the police. The Tamil Nadu government was planning to locate a battalion of 1,000 armed policemen in North Arcot, with Tirupattur as headquarter as a long term measure to combat Naxalite activities. This followed persistent demands from the people and MLAs there to bring peace and security.

The police claimed that the physical presence of over 500 policemen in North Arcot and Dhamapuri had helped to curb Naxalite activities.<sup>71</sup> The villagers were no longer afraid and even volunteered information about Naxalite movements to the police stations that had now been opened in the "Naxalite - infested" Elagiri hills and Kurisalampet in North Arcot and Dhamapuri districts respectively.

In mid-October 1980, a "fact finding committee" consisting of academicians, lawyers, journalists and social scientists, went to Tirupattur to study the so-called police-Naxalite encounters but the committee's tour came to an abrupt

end as its members were attacked by a huge crowd. The police "escorted" them out of town. While the committee members alleged that the police colluded with the crowd which attacked them, the police denied this as "ingratitude" and said the committee had refused to lodge a complaint about the incident. Around the same time, a group of Sarvodaya workers led by the chairman of the state unit of the Sarvodaya mandal, who toured some of areas in Dhamapuri was also attacked and robbed of their belongings.

Another report gave the following further analysis regarding the situation in the North Arcot and Dhamapuri districts. Around 1976, a group of about fifty young people in Jolarpet organised themselves for social and economic justice. When they started, they did not have any particular ideological orientation. They conducted study classes to learn the teachings of Periyar, Ambedkar and other thinkers and social reformers. The youths soon found that the teachings of these thinkers had no practical utility. There was no state machinery to implement them. Therefore, they took upon themselves the implementation of some of the intended social reforms. This brought them into direct confrontation with the vested interests and the state. The following are a few examples.

A Kurumba (Harijan) girl who worked as a school assistant fell in love with a rich landlord's son and got pregnant. But the girl was deserted by the boy. The boy's

father complained to the police that his son had been kidnapped and married against his will. The youngmen took the police inspector to the house where the boy and the girl were living and showed the police that the allegation was false. But the custodians of the law were not convinced and charged the youths with unlawful confinement and with preventing public servants from discharging their duties. Though the court held that the marriage was illegal, the boy did not want to marry any other girl, fearing this group.

A 'dhobi' boy passed the S.E.C examination. When he went to collect the certificate, the headmaster of his school demanded Rs.5. The boy could not afford this amount. He approached the youths. They intervened on behalf of the boy and forced the headmaster to give the certificate. The custodians of the law again got offended and prosecuted the youths.

In 1975, Seeralan, Sivalingam, Chakravarthi and other peasants started movement in Ponneri village for the implementation of minimum wages fixed under 20 point economic programme. Their first target was a Congress (I) landlord, Narayanaswamy Reddiar. He was forced to implement the programme of his own party. At this juncture, some other landlords led by Kesava Reddiar, Panchayat President and DMK man, came to the forefront and organised all the landlords

of the area irrespective of their political affiliations, and defeated the peasant movement for the minimum wages with the active help of the police.

It is not surprising that the youths of Jolarpet who started as social reformers turned into Naxalites. The growing strength of the Naxalites alarmed the state and the landlords. The police and the landlords organised resistance against Naxalites. The leaders of this resistance group were Kesava Reddiar in Timupattur and Vellai Gounder in Dharmapuri.<sup>72</sup> The "Naxalites" were beyond the pale of law. They could be killed like dogs by the police and the landlords. The "Naxalites" had to strike back for their own survival. The enemies of the people were marked out and a series of killings were carried out, within a week of Kesava Reddiar's death, Vellai Gounder in Dharmapuri was also killed.

In 1979, the CPI made an attempt to crush the Naxalites with the help of the landlords and the police. Some CPI workers led by one Murugan, a contractor, caught hold of one Chakarai, bound him and foot and speared him to death. Murugan and seven other CPI workers were arrested but were released on bail. Immediately after his release, Murugan was waylaid and killed. The police could not arrest the culprit; those who were "annihilated" in the area were either ruthless exploiters or police informers. For example, in Athipalliam village of Dharmapuri there was a moneylender who used to travel by bullock cart. He never allowed the

driver of the bullock cart to sit. He had to run alongside the cart.

A large number of cases with identical charges were filed against many youths. The charges were theft, robbery, decoity and the like. Many of these youngsters were released on bail on condition that they reported to the police station everyday and did not leave Tirupattur town. There were hundreds of such boys who had been released on conditional bail. Most of them were Harijans. They could not find any work in Tirupattur and could not get any place to stay in. If anybody gave them shelter, the police intimidated and blacklisted him. Circumstances forced many of these boys to jump bail and flee North Arcot and Dhamapuri districts.

## V

In order to document the processes at work in rural Tamil Nadu, informal and unstructured interviews were conducted with a cross section of small farmers; marginal farmers and agricultural labourers; academics engaged in grass roots research; social workers; representatives of voluntary agencies and rural activists; and administrators at different levels in the district and state headquarters. A series of observations emerged. These have their relevance in evaluating the situation in rural Tamil Nadu.

Interviews with the rural poor confirmed the findings of various research studies and journalistic reportage about the socio-economic conditions of agricultural labourers and others and made it clear that the background to rural unrest and consequent police repression was essentially issues such as land reforms, bonded labour, minimum wages, civil rights, 'atrocities', molestation of rural women, equal remuneration for equal work, implementation of the anti-poverty programmes and so on. In several villages in the North Arcot and Dharmapuri districts agricultural labourers reported payment of minimum wages below the statutory minimum. The system of bonded labour is prevalent in many forms. The land reforms legislation remained a dead letter in the face of pressure from landlords in collusion with the administration. Eviction of tenants was common. When radical youths intervened to prevent or correct illegal evictions they were branded as Naxalites. The propaganda was carried on by local political elites that the Naxalites had established a parallel government and were out to dispossess the landlords. One of these radical youths, Balan, who also became a prominent political activist, died after an encounter with the police in September, 1980. Besides eviction of tenants, lands of poor peasants were also illegally grabbed. The evidence of interaction of the various administrative agencies with the rural rich became clear in the course of the interviews. Aspirations of the poor were made to appear as offences against the law and even as threats to

the security of the state. Organisations (or groups or individuals) which emerged to organise the rural poor for their rights (enshrined in the 20-Point Programme and ostensibly sought to be implemented by the government) became the targets of attack by the police and the rural vested interests. It was as though the various anti-poverty programmes and pronouncements did not exist as far as the rural poor in these districts were concerned.

A set of former rural activists many of them belonging to the Scheduled Castes and in low-income occupations in agriculture reported that they were tortured or harassed in police custody. False criminal cases of various kinds were foisted against them. The landlords imposed "social boycott" against the rural poor and refused to employ them. Politicians belonging to the ruling party and the dominant groups, were members of upper castes and classes and sided with the police. Of the over twenty rural activists killed in encounters with the police in the rural areas of the two districts, more than half were reported to be members of the Scheduled Castes.

The so called former "Naxalites" came out with sociologically significant insights during interviews. Many complained of having been charged with false criminal cases. Some said they became sympathetic to the Naxalites because of harassment and atrocities by caste Hindus in the villages. Some said they were arrested by the police for harbouring



"Naxalites". The following points are of interest:-

- i). Some were arrested by the police when they were found listening to revolutionary songs. Their implication in false cases had destroyed their livelihood.
- ii). One was branded a "Naxalite" because he was found talking to a suspected "Naxalite".
- iii). An agricultural labourer who went to see a relative in a nearby village (considered a centre of "Naxalite" activity by the police) was charged with dacoity and arson.
- iv). Another was beaten up by the police and branded as a "Naxalite" for feeding a stranger who was considered a "Naxalite" by the police.
- v). One joined the "Naxalites" as he could not bear the atrocities of the village elites; and due to poverty. Currently, he is running a poultry farm with Government assistance. If he had been given this assistance earlier he would not have become a "Naxalite".
- vi). Another had a piece of land which was forcibly occupied by a village landlord. When he asked for his rights, the landlord approached the police and false cases were registered against him.
- vii). Another stated that he was forced to join the "Naxalites" to protest against the rampant untouchability prevailing in his village.

viii) An SC agricultural labourer said he became a "Naxalite" because of the atrocities against his community by the Caste Hindus in his village.

ix) Another said that one day he saw some policemen chasing boot-leggers. The latter ran through his land. At that time, his brother was returning home from the village well after his bath. The police caught him and beat him up on suspicion. When his mother intervened she was also severely beaten, as a result of which she became mentally deranged. Unable to bear police atrocities, he joined the "Naxalites" to seek justice.

x) One of the leaders of the Naxalites was a S.C. agricultural labourer who was protesting against the introduction of cash crops which hit the livelihood of the rural poor.

The main point that emerged was that most of the so called Naxalites were not really 'Naxalites' but poor and landless peasants experiencing day-to-day oppression in village society. The landlords, village headmen and others used the police machinery to settle scores with the village poor who were demanding their human, social and legal rights.

Academics engaged in grassroots research on development programmes threw a revealing light on the nature and impact of these programmes and on the perceptions of the common people about them. A scholar who has carried out grass roots research into the milk animal component of the IRDP in selected villages of two Blocks in a district threw light on

some of the general issues of policy implementation by the development administration and the political-administrative world of the Block Development Officer.<sup>73</sup> The following important points were made:-

- i) In the rush to meet financial and physical targets development programme funds are often allocated away from Blocks with low spending capacity (characterised by low rainfall, poor irrigation facilities, no industries, few banks and poor transport facilities) to better endowed Blocks where the money is more easily spent. The average collector or Project Officer of the District Rural Development Agency is more concerned that the district targets be met than that the greatest effort for least likely return be put to the poorest Block.
- ii) There was no relation between the number of Scheduled Caste people in a village and the benefits received; this contradicted the very important administrative guideline that villages with an "accent on people below the poverty line" must be helped to the greatest extent.
- iii) In village after village, the reasons for benefits received had more to do with certain people in the villages making an effort to get them, rather than the development administrators going to the village, explaining the programme and enlisting people's participation.

iv) There was fairly widespread evidence of the operation of middlemen and the payment of bribes during the receipt of benefits by the villagers. The average beneficiary in one of the Blocks had virtually no contact with the administration thanks to the operation of developmental middlemen.

v) In one of the villages, most of the beneficiaries were SC people, who were engaged as agricultural labourers and construction gang coolies by the milk society president, who was also a member of the village's dominant caste, a contractor, a major faction leader of the village and the local Secretary of the ruling party. They had no say in the operations of the society and were probably being cheated by those responsible for the accounts. There were malpractices in the measurement of milk, selection of beneficiaries and so on. A significant number of milk society presidents were also contractors who because of their numerous business visits to the Block office, would collect information about programmes being implemented in the Block and of the possible profits that could be made by running milk societies.

vi) There were also many constraints stemming from the larger administrative and socio-political context of policy implementation at the Block level:

a) For the BDO to be successful in a system of limited promotion and excessive transfer he must be able to juggle programme rules and regulations, of resource allocation with

the demands of politicians that resources be allocated in a particularistic way.

b) Administrative superiors demand that all physical and financial targets are met; numerous reports and attendance at various meetings. According to one estimate, the BDO has to submit about one hundred reports in a month to his seniors. Whenever higher officials came to the Block the BDO would have to be at their beck and call keeping him away from all work, including development work.

c) The BDO's success in a Block depends more on his astuteness in distributing contracts than on his ability to devise a block economic plan or to implement a policy like I DP. Thus, the villagers perceived the task of the development administration as "building and maintenance" administration because the "visible" aspect of development administration had little to do with "development." The main demands on the local administrator from the political arena related far more to building contracts than to poverty alleviation or development work. Villagers did complain of poor street lighting or bad drainage but rarely of any benefits they may not have received from specific development programmes because most people did not know of the existence of programmes under which they would be eligible to receive assistance.

A former collector of the North Arcot district drew attention to the extremely feudal character of the agrarian structure in this region, unlike in Tanjore district which has

seen the emergence of capitalist elements in agriculture. The landlords were cruel with their sharecroppers and agricultural labourers. There was thus considerable scope for agrarian discontent. The police, according to him, typically felt that Naxalite activities was the outcome of the visit in early 70's of Charu Mazumdar to the area and his success in recruiting some local youths to the cause. They also felt that the justice system in the area had failed with a number of murder cases ending in acquittal. The public felt that while there could be an element of ideological orientation on the part of some of the so-called Naxalites, the others were certainly not ideologically oriented. Desperate elements from the criminal gangs operating along the local railways and loco-sheds took cover under the label of Naxalites to carry out regular extortions from landlords. However, in some areas, specifically in about 10 villages, there was quite a strong resentment among the poorer sections against landlords and the feeling that there was need for "direct action."

The former Collector said that the internal view taken in the state police headquarters was in favour of the "elimination" of the Naxalites, without going through the necessarily long-drawn out and possibly unsuccessful legal process. Then followed a number of cases of suspicious deaths of so-called Naxalites. Indeed, at the end of the police "operations" in mid-82, the top police authority in the region did write an interesting letter to the District Officer that

the police part of the work was now over and that it was now up to the collector to take up developmental work! Special development programmes followed.

The officer traced the agrarian tensions in the region to greater awareness on the part of the Harijans about their rights which itself was an outcome of the fact that a larger number of the local people had found employment in the Armed Forces (an enlightening influence). Social discrimination and atrocities were not easily accepted, certainly not in the Tirupattur area. The police department at the cutting edge level was manned by bad elements, with no direct recruitment at the sub-inspector level. The S.I. in one of the local police stations was a worse extortionist than the so-called 'Naxalites'. The cutting edge level police were always aligned to the local gentry and it was only when matters came to the Collector's notice that things took a different shape. On the question of minimum wages, the officer said that the Act could not be enforced because the complainant would not find future employment.

Another IAS official with first hand experience of the administrative situation in the Dhamapuri district made the following interesting points:-

- i) The Right Communists in this district are very violent and the police call them Naxalites.
- ii) The agricultural workers are mostly Scheduled Castes. The benefits of development have not reached them.

- iii) The instruments of Government have only a transient interest in backward Dhamanuri district as most of the officers and staff do not keep their families with them for various reasons and go away to Madras and elsewhere during the holidays and weekends. In other words, absentee administration is widely prevalent in addition to absentee landlordism.
- iv) Corruption in Dhamanuri is the highest. This includes the police department which is also inefficient. Officers at the cutting-edge level are mostly from outside and belong to the community of Gounders. They are inclined to align with local landlords of their own community in dealing with Scheduled Castes agricultural labourers and small farmers.
- v) In comparison to other districts of Tamilnadu, Dhamanuri is particularly neglected because it is very backward and is devoid of political clout. Wages of agricultural labourers are even lower than in other districts and they are more unorganised and exploited than in other districts.
- vi) The forest department is another factor leading to social unrest. The Department periodically evicts landless labourers and claims unreclaimed land as their land.



- vii) Rural employment schemes, food for work, Co-operatives etc., have not taken off in Dhamapuri. Bondage and money lending are prominent. Macro level interest in these problems is necessary.
- viii) The organisational structure and staffing pattern of the district police needs a careful look. There could be greater recruitment for the police from the local elements.
- ix) In the context of Naxalite activities, the following factors are relevant:-
- i) Extreme poverty.
  - ii) Wage levels are extremely low.
  - iii) It is the trijunction between Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka.
  - iv) Violence is not a product of Naxalite activities but the result of social oppression. (In this connection, he mentioned that sometime ago the local Harijans had protested against and gone to court regarding the objection raised by caste Hindus to Harijan women putting on blouses).
- x) The relative lack of success of the administration, in effectively implementing well-meaning social welfare programmes has led to erosion of public confidence in the administration as an instrument of change. The 'Slogans of Politics' and 'politicisation of institutions' has also led to this situation.

- xi) There is scope for a deep study of the weaker sections' perception of social welfare programmes and of the factors behind the apparent inability of government officers and delivery systems to help the small man in rural and urban sectors. In this connection, a study could be made of the working of such programmes on SFDA, FFW, TRYKEM abolition of bonded labour, enforcement of PCRAC etc. He mentioned that in some cases the released bonded labourers had to go back to their original situation in the absence of appropriate mechanisms for rehabilitation.
- xii) The tilt towards the poorer sections which was a factor in planning during the 50's has got progressively eroded in the subsequent period. In managing rural services (in terms of fertilisers, credits etc.) we should not take shelter behind rules and regulation; but should reach out to the common man. It is also the duty of Government to ensure fairness in transactions.
- xiii) While the urban areas are getting more than the minimum in terms of social services, the rural areas are getting much less than the minimum. This has led to the emergence of a major contradiction between the urban and rural sectors as a whole. This is evident in the current farmers' agitation.

xiv) A change in terms of attitudes, perception, institution building, style of living etc., on the part of Government agencies and officers, is essential to regenerated public confidence in the administrative machinery as an instrument of change with a conscious bias towards the welfare of weaker sections.

The local police officials who were interviewed generally espoused the police point of view although their observations did give evidence of awareness of the extremes of disparities in incomes and assets in the area and of the wide prevalence of social injustice and exploitation. Some of the police officials took pride in their "efficiency" in dealing with the "Naxalite problem" and pointed out their current positive role in the "rehabilitation" of the former Naxalites. The local top police official, apparently referring to the 'new-fangled' public interest litigation, stated solemnly that the judiciary should not "interfere" with the smooth functioning of the police department!

One of the officials at the state headquarters drew attention to the genuine neglect of rural development in the state. For example, he said, in the name of the industrial development of backward districts, what was being done was to allow major industrial groups to expand into rural areas in a capital-intensive way instead of promoting local small-scale industrial enterprise in an indigenous manner. Similar was the situation in regard to issues such as drinking water,

roads, housing and so on for rural areas: instead finding solutions in a local manner with local talent what was being done was to allow urban domination of rural areas. According to him, redistribution of productive wealth was not the only solution to rural problems. What was necessary was to alter the present pattern of development.

A secretary to the Government of Tamil Nadu himself a member of a Scheduled Caste, observed that statistically all Harijan 'cheris' may be shown to have been electrified or provided with water taps but the reality is quite different. Provision of water taps or electricity is one thing but accessibility to Harijans quite another; the latter depended on the power structure in the village. The elite non-Brahmin middle castes now in control of socio-economic power in the villages have taken on the role of the protector of the system. He felt that lack of sympathy and even hostility for weaker sections was pervasive in the administration, especially the police. At the institutional level, the politicians, once having "captured" political power, felt they were no longer responsible to the public; and they could do what they liked, irrespective of public opinion. The police machinery exploited the weaknesses of the political leadership in terms of their need for obvious deference, and protocol and exaggerated its feeling of self-importance. Police played a powerful role in the inner councils of the Government and were able to get their budget sanctioned at

the highest level whatever may be the views of the Secretariat official or even the Finance Minister. There was a mutually beneficial proximity between the police and the political leadership. The police used this proximity to become high handed in their dealings with the public.

To illustrate the anti-Harijan bias of the police, the officer gave the following examples drawing from his professional experience:

i) When he was collector in a district, a case of a Sub-Inspector of police who had beaten up a lawyer belonging to a Scheduled Caste came up. The police tried to suppress the case but the Collector intervened and protested. As a result, the police took a hostile stand towards him during the rest of his tenure in the district and even boycotted his farewell when he was transferred!

ii) In another case, a village teacher belonging to a Scheduled Caste was murdered. In turn, the Scheduled Caste villagers migrated from the village. When the collector intervened to ask the police to investigate the matter, they responded that the fears of the Scheduled Caste villagers were exaggerated!

iii) There was another case in a village of a Caste Hindu boy who poured acid on a Harijan girl and set fire to her. When the collector asked for a report on the matter, the police said that the boy was not traceable! How could one believe the police, the officer asked!

iv) In another case, a Panchayat Union Chairman belonging to a middle caste laid a road blocking the traditional pathway of the Harijans to their burial ground. Instead of trying to help the Harijans to continue to enjoy their traditional rights, the police tried to persuade them to take a different route to the burial ground.'

v) In another case, Harijans had perforce to take a dead body along a public path rather than the traditional path along which a canal 'bundh' was constructed. The caste Hindus objected and overawed the Harijans who had to run away. The police then registered a false criminal case against the Harijans at the instance of the caste Hindus!

The officer further observed that one of the potent sources of tension between Caste Hindus and Harijans in the villages today is that government Poromboke lands (often including the path ways to Harijans "cheris" and burial grounds) have been encroached for cultivation by caste Hindus. When the Harijan, tried to use these pathways, clashes ensued. He added that the reservation of 38% of Government posts for the Backward castes (in contrast to the 18% reserved for Harijans) has greatly helped these castes to entrench themselves and become politically powerful. These castes were well represented in all services including the police; this explained the behaviour of the administration as a whole vis-a-vis the weaker sections. Another factor promoting tension was the recognition for reservation in Government posts of the Scheduled Caste converts to Christianity.

Other secretariat officials who were interviewed were unanimous on the power of the police to get their demands and viewpoints conceded at the highest political level whatever may be the view taken or expressed in files by the secretariat. Likewise, the district police machinery took orders directly from their officers at the state headquarters and largely ignored the district collector. Senior Secretariat officials expressed their disgust in private over the prevailing administrative culture in which even routine decisions were considered secret. Every official was kept on tenterhooks about his next posting. Well-considered advice and opinion on files by the Secretariat officials was often overruled by the political executive under the influence of the police machinery and entirely arbitrary decisions taken. The decision making structure at the political level closely drew upon police advice and did not consider points of view emanating from the secretariat. A sense of frustration on the part of these officials was the result.

Another senior official and member of a Scheduled Caste drew attention to still prevailing feudal outlook in the villages and the inequitable agrarian set up. While all kinds of progressive policies have been adopted in the post independence period, the real snag lay in implementation of the policies. He felt that on an average in only one out of every hundred cases of atrocities, discrimination etc. taking

place in the villages, was the administration really helpful to the victims. Many of the incidents of violence arose out of the assertion of their rights by the poor, a development in the right direction. He compared the situation of the Scheduled Castes' today to that of the blacks in America after the abolition of slavery. He felt that on account of several factors the district administration generally sided with the rich against the poor. A district official today had to be very tough if he wanted to do the right thing by the poor. There ought to be a proper mix of people in the administration at the cutting edge level. They must be specially trained and committed to social welfare. The political leadership was not receptive and sympathetic. He cited the case of some politicians who would not allow the Harijans to take water from their wells in their villages but would ask for their votes! Once that happened, that would be deliverance for the country. Summing up, he said that while progress has been made in terms of education, economic development and political representation of the weaker sections, a lot remained to be done. The weaker sections have become conscious of their rights but that was not enough. The Scheduled Caste political leadership has been disappointing and has been exploiting its own brethren.

Another official said that the Naxalites in Tamil Nadu were not organised as they were in Andhra Pradesh. He felt that the conditions of the Scheduled Castes were not



improving really. The oppression came from the so called Other Backward Classes. There were over 40 Harijan MLAs equally divided between the two major political parties of the state. The leftist movement was weak. Concessions did not percolate further down even among the SCs; the advanced among them have benefited more than the others. Politically, the situation in the state defied logic.

Some of the more perceptive senior police officials were aware of the realities of the rural situation in the state. One of them even stated that what needed investigation was "police violence" rather than "rural violence". The striking feature was, however, the sense of departmental solidarity that they displayed and their obedience to the organisational imperative of discipline, hierarchy and monolithic, top-down decision making style. Other notable features were the secrecy of their administrative style and the paramilitary character of their organisational behaviour. Given these features, the police seemed to have become unable to respond organisationally in a realistic manner to the emerging agrarian tensions in the state. With the political support they were able to elicit, the temptation was to find military solutions to social and political problems.

The interviews with civil servants at different levels thus made it clear that apart from off the record observations in which sensitivity was revealed, the official machinery, in the main, tended to look the problem in law and order terms.

Even a cursory review of the available data would have made it to the policy makers the real causes behind agrarian tensions and the measures necessary to deal with them. Such a review was not undertaken. Planning and development tended to be viewed largely in technocratic terms and the social consequences of development measures neglected. The status quo orientation and the departmental bias of the different wings of the state administration prevent them from taking an integrated view of economic problems which erupt into social tensions. Such an integrated view can only occur when the policy makers in the state, the chief secretary at the head of the administration and the Chief Minister at the head of the Government, give a lead not only by adopting a sensitive posture but also by calling inter-departmental meetings to discuss the issues involved, chalk out action points within an appropriate framework, and so on. On the other hand, there is evidence to show that matters were allowed to drift in the administration with the result that the police were left to handle the ugly situation that was developing in the only way they had been trained to handle such problems - by repression. A sensitive police officer ruefully remarked that the involvement of the police in long term policy planning was nil (being alien to the prevailing administrative ethos); that they were involved in only short term fire-fighting operations; and that police excesses may evoke strong emotions in the short-term but would not be long lasting.

Senior I.P.S. officials at the highest level no less than their I.A.S. colleagues, when faced with situations of serious agrarian conflicts, did not take a firm stand nor tell the government clearly that there is a limit to pure police measures in handling social tensions of this kind. On the other hand, the way in which some senior police officials went out of the way to project the problem before the public and the political leadership by claiming that the "Naxalites" were receiving foreign assistance in terms of money, weapons and ideological literature and so on and the way in which they tried to prosecute public spirited individuals and organisations which sought to investigate the various incidents violence, with charges of sedition, (a charge which has rarely been used in free India) appears to defy logic.

## VI

Massive state intervention in social processes is an accepted premise of development policy in India. Even those opposed to state repression of the rural poor may not question the need and desirability of state intervention for beneficent purposes. Proliferation of state institutions for developmental purposes therefore is one of the most visible features of the rural administrative scene in Tamil Nadu and elsewhere. Both at the state and district levels there are several administrative

departments, institutions and organisations dealing with different aspects of rural development policy and programmes. These agencies function without much horizontal integration, a feature noted in several studies<sup>74</sup> but which also came out sharply and clearly during field work in Tamil Nadu and informal interaction with officials at different levels from the state to the district and block levels.

An experienced official and perceptive scholar notes the emergence of a "chaotic administrative pattern" at the block level with an exponential expansion in workload and feverish attempts by state governments to strengthen the block structure.<sup>75</sup> He calls for the restoration of the pivotal role of the BDO to establish operational horizontal linkages with the line departments whose activities should converge on the poor households as well as poverty groups. At the district level, a "chaotic mosaic" of committees agencies, boards and so on exist resulting "mostly in utter confusions."<sup>76</sup> At the state level, other development policies which lead to greater disparities or differentiation of income distribution cannot be offset by anti-poverty programmes with something like 5 to 10 percent of plan allocations. The benefits accruing to the poor under programmes such as education, health water supply and housing (the Minimum Needs Programme) are often "totally separated" both at the district and state levels from the programmes for poverty alleviation. The separation of agriculture through 'T & V' from the main rural development set up

has also created a hiatus at the local administrative level.<sup>77</sup>  
The scholar also notes a "large data gap" at the block level in regard to the monitoring of activities and programmes and perceptively observes that if preliminary data are not classified or collected correctly at this level no amount of sophistication at the top would be adequate. A very high degree of competence in planning, directing and technical supervision would be required at the district level. Further, since the success of anti poverty programme involves a degree of "conflict of interest" with the rural power structure, reorientation of attitudes is essential for development personnel on the "genesis, philosophy, concept and mechanics" of the anti poverty package.

However, no policy mechanisms exists at block or district or state levels to make a deep going study of agrarian tensions which are a response to as well as a result of developmental processes in agriculture. Tensions which result in violence but which have deeper developmental implications are left to be handled by the traditional regulatory mechanism, the police. Due to historical background the Indian police has a traditional preoccupation with the status quo and perform an "eyes and ears" function in regard to the security and stability of the established order.<sup>78</sup>  
Historically the primary objective of district administration in India has been the maintenance of order and tranquillity in the countryside. The excellence of an administrative or

police officer is judged by his capacity to maintain order. Among the multiplicity of statutes, the basic criminal laws, the I.P.C. and the Cr.P.C. are still treated and studied as "major acts" the other social welfare legislations being relegated to the position of "minor acts". Yet, it is easy to see that issues such as minimum wages, sharing of crops, security of tenure, allotment of ceiling surplus lands, bonded labour, civil rights of the poor and so on would often lead to violation of peace and tranquillity in rural areas. Any movement aimed at securing possession of land or fixity of tenure would alter prevailing property relations and production structure. When this happens, the landowning classes with easy access to the administration can invoke the relevant provisions of the IPC and the Cr.P.C. against the rural poor. An assembly of men agitating for certain legitimate demands could be dealt with for rioting. Case studies on the "Bargadars of Salihan" and "Indira Lohar and the Due Process of Law" have shown how the rural powers that be can nullify social welfare legislations for the rural poor in the name of the criminal laws. Organisations of the peasantry are not registered as trade unions under The Trade Unions Act of 1926 and enjoy no protection from civil suits and criminal conspiracy.<sup>79</sup> There is no "conspiracy" or deliberate policy behind these repressive measures in general but they begin almost as a piece of administrative "reflex action" to any concerted move by the poor peasantry and the agricultural

labourers. The village poor also believe implicitly that laws are there only to be utilised against them by the landlords. That the same sections of the Criminal Procedure Code could also be used by them against the landowners could not be believed by many share croppers and agricultural workers in various states; during work done for the Working Group on Land Reforms of the National Commission on Agriculture.<sup>80</sup> Bandyopadhyay further observes that agricultural workers or sharecropper who take some direct action to establish their rights to land have generally been prosecuted under the various provisions of the I.P.C. and the Cr.P.C. In the Motihari district of Bihar where in a number of villages the poor have combined successfully to obtain higher wages, and the legal share of crops, they have had over a thousand cases filed against them under the I.P.C. The impediments posed by the legal and administrative machinery operate as a powerful inhibiting factor against the emergence of organisations of the rural poor. Only an intimate knowledge of the functioning of the Indian administrative machinery at the district level and of the harassment and persecution that the organisers of the rural poor have to face, can lead one to correctly evaluate the importance and weight of this constraint. In the administrative set up the District Officer holds a unique position. He administers all the regulatory and almost all the welfare and reformative laws. This unique institution could have been utilised for initiating social

changes with a much greater degree of ease and promptitude than has happened in India till date.<sup>81</sup>

The field level administrative reality in rural Tamil Nadu today bring out forcefully the truth of the above observations. The police machinery in the state appears to have arrogated to itself the right to deal as it see fit (a tendency visible in some other states as well) with manifestations of rural discontent irrespective of their varied ramifications in the rural social structures and process.

Apart from the objective constraints imposed by the administrative and legal set up, a subjective constraint in regard to their role perception also seems to prevent police officers from appreciating their true social role.<sup>82</sup> Referring to the general police reluctance to take on the implementation of social legislation as opposed to their traditional role of crime prevention and investigation, a scholar has observed<sup>83</sup> that the policeman's perception of what is crime is derived from a detective fiction image of himself as a machoman, and his orthodox and powerbased frame of mind. The police reluctance to implement social legislation may imply subconscious faith in the structure of society in which children, women, harijans and other weaker sections are expected to accept inequality and injustice without question. Resistance to social legislation may amount to resistance to any changes in the social structure.

The intelligence machinery which collects, collates and analyses social, especially rural tensions and which plays



an important role in policy processes at the district, state and central levels tends to view social movements from the standpoint of the threat they pose to the stability and security of the regime in power. It has also its powerful organisational interests (steadily expanding in the recent period) in projecting trends regarding rural tensions in a predominantly security-related perspective. During fieldwork in Tamil Nadu one came up repeatedly against divergent perceptions in regard to social trends on the part of IAS officials on the one hand and IPS officials on the other stemming from their separate organisation interests, concerns, orientations and perspectives.<sup>83A</sup> However, the police and intelligence establishment being a more monolithic organisation and the subject of security a sensitive subject, it enjoys a somewhat exclusive and priority attention in the inner councils of government, much to the chagrin and discomfiture of senior IAS officials.

In this context, the dominant perception of the role of public administration on the part of practitioners and others becomes important. Administrative and police training and research institutions are largely satisfied with the management science orientation. The practical concerns of the discipline tend to take it away from broader social science moorings and a meaningful understanding of the role of politics in administration and the deeper linkages of social structure and process.<sup>84</sup> If the nature of the state itself is in most instances at the root of poverty, inequality and injustice in the Third World, then

this needs to be seriously examined. The practitioners and theorists of public administration have to develop adequate explanatory and conceptual strength to relate administration to the social power structure.

Development analysis has moved away from exclusive concern with the magnitude of growth to concentration on the structure and content of growth as well as the distribution of its benefits. It is becoming clear that growth unconstrained by equity and justice by, passes the poor. If development is to be the goal, then emphasis must shift to the immediate and direct satisfaction of the basic human needs.<sup>85</sup> A specialist on Indian agriculture, has recently observed<sup>86</sup> that the major contradiction today is the one between agricultural labourers on the one hand and employers of all categories (small, medium and big) on the other. Although there may be political contradictions among the various categories of employers, there are no economic contradictions. The major feature of Indian agriculture has been that of growth in agricultural output with no growth of agricultural employment. The employment question is the most serious issue of Indian agriculture. Solutions however, have to be found outside agriculture.

It is in this context, that the findings of a recent official report become relevant.<sup>87</sup> According to the census of 1981 the number of agricultural labourers in the country including marginal workers was 64.4 millions.

Increasing at an annual rate of 2.5 per cent, the number would 74.68 millions in 1987. This does not include the self employed agriculturists whose number in 1981 was 92.53 millions. There is no sharp demarcation between agricultural labourers and landholders as quite a large number have small holdings and have to work as agricultural labour for at least a part of the year. Agricultural labourers thus constitute the largest segment of wage employed workers in the country. However, they are outside <sup>the</sup> pale of labour laws except the Minimum Wages Act, 1978. They are primarily dependent on job opportunities provided the landholders. The agricultural labour force is expanding rapidly due to the pauperisation of the peasantry, but have no reasonable bargaining power due to their utter dependence and unorganised character.

The lack of job opportunities, the preponderance of monocrop areas in the national agriculture, the tardy development of agro-industries and limited expansion of agro-irrigation together with inadequate growth of industry contribute to the low level of the agricultural wage. Since the funds allocated are too meagre, the anti-poverty schemes have made no major impact. In a number of places, the agricultural workers complained to the sub-committee that the contractors engaged by the government to carry out different types of schemes were paying less than the minimum wage. Even government departments were reportedly resorting to underpayment. Nowhere in the country was the minimum wage for agricultural workers being

enforced round the year. In Bihar there were instances of the notification of revised wage not reaching the block level administration even six months after its publication by the state government. The Labour Inspectors did not go to the villages regularly and there was a tendency to settle wage disputes outside the court. There was hardly a case of landlords being faulted for non-payment of minimum wages. In one case, workers who struck work for enhanced wages, were debarred from employment. The local administration appeared to be loaded in favour of the landowning sections. There were also complaints of police atrocities and atrocities by landowning sections. Complaints of the persistence of the bonded labour systems were received in the states of Madhya Pradesh, Bihar, Orissa, Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu. Efforts to promote organisations of the rural poor in the context of enforcement of labour laws in rural areas, had not been successful. The attitude of the Government machinery was not always sympathetic. These facts underlined the need for a comprehensive central legislation providing a basic framework for the working conditions, wages and social security of agricultural labourers.

The Parliamentary Sub-Committee thus attempts to bring out the pressing seriousness of the situation affecting the biggest chunk of the rural poor in India today. It is the existence, persistence and aggravation of the conditions mentioned by the committee that lead to the emergence of

elements of radical sentiment and organisation among the rural poor. Class and caste linkages of the administrative structure at different levels, among other factors, contribute to the kind of state repression documented in this report and elsewhere.

The political factor is no less important, in appreciating the qualitatively changed social and administrative realities for the rural poor. The post-Nehru period in general has been characterised by the breakdown of the political consensus around the Nehru-Mahalanobis approach to economic management and the non-emergence of a new consensus.<sup>88</sup> Increasing squabbles among the ruling classes coupled with growing restiveness and rebelliousness on the part of the masses has led to a greater degree of state repression of the rural poor. The accession of provincial agricultural propertied classes to political power has led, by a combination of inexperience in administration and the natural ruthlessness of the newly rich, to make the police a central instrument of administration. This excessive reliance on the police and armed forces has led to increasingly frequent incidence of "police atrocities."

This study has argued that the problem of so-called Naxalite violence to contain which much of the administrative resources of the state are devoted is a complex issue with deep socio-structural linkages. It has to be viewed, moreover, in the context of the increasing violence against the rural

poor reported by the official agencies themselves in a partial and limited way. Effective state intervention to enforce minimum wages, implement land reforms, protect the civil rights of the poor, put an end to "atrocities" and crimes against the poor by the rural power structure often in collaboration with the police, more efficiently implement the welfare programmes and so on may go some way in mitigating the problem. A more important first step would be to initiate a comprehensive reappraisal of the development process under way. This, however, depends on further changes in the correlation of socio-political forces at different levels, a topic outside the scope of the present work.

In the light of the findings of this study, therefore, the administrative future for the rural poor in Tamil Nadu as elsewhere appears rather bleak.

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6. For example, the expenditure on Scheduled Castes' development programmes over the successive Five Year Plans have shown a gradual increase.
7. Some of the data in this connection have been analysed in the author's Violence Against the Scheduled Castes in India, Occasional Paper Number XXI X, Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, Teen Murti, New Delhi.
8. For example, P. C. Joshi 'Poverty, Land Hunger and Emerging Class conflicts in Rural India' in Steve Jones et al (ed) Rural Poverty and Agrarian Reforms (Allied Publishers, 1982).
9. Partly based on the author's professional experience and field work in different parts of India. See the author's Administrative Response to Agrarian Struggles in the Context of Bihar: A Public Policy Approach, Occasional Paper No. XXXIV, Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, Teen Murti House, New Delhi.



10. Some studies have referred to what has been called "governmental lawlessness". See A. R. Desai Violation of Democratic Rights in India Vol.I, (Popular Prakashan, Bombay, 1986). This phenomenon of the emerging new role of the state machinery in the context escalating rural tensions seems to partly explain the emergence of a number of civil rights organisations in different parts of the country.
11. Report of the Committee to Review the Existing Administrative Arrangements for Rural Development and Poverty Alleviation Programmes, Department of Rural Development, Ministry of Agriculture (December 1985) Chapter II. pp. 5-14.
- 11A. This paper argues that the emphasis on the increase in "Naxalite" violence in the recent period often highlighted in official and other reports, should be seen against the background of the very big increase in violence against weaker sections reported by official agencies themselves. (There are several grounds for believing that the reported figures may be a considerable under-estimate). These two trends are not often seen together in official reportage and analyses. A one-sided stress on the former is likely to lead to a misperception of the realities on the ground. Similarly it is important to appreciate that developmental processes themselves are currently responsible for promoting socio-economic unrest in rural areas. Official analyses of rural tensions, often monopolised by police and intelligence agencies, because of their security-related concerns, overemphasise the political as compared to the social aspect. Repressive measures of the type documented in Section IV of the report without a reassessment of the developmental processes themselves may be no avail.
12. This section is based on an analysis of the available press reports, supplemented in some places by information collected through personal conversations during field work in the state during October 1986. These incidents have been chosen for analysis because of their importance in illustrating (i) the emerging new role of the state machinery in some parts of the country (characterised by some scholars as "governmental lawlessness"); (ii) the seriousness of the underlying agrarian causes; (iii) the need for a more appropriate strategy of administrative intervention in rural areas, in the light of the findings contained in the other sections of the paper.
13. Partly based on the author's professional experience.



14. Two major kinds of agrarian tensions have been noticed in the different states of India during the recent period: One, tensions arising from movements of farmers for subsidised inputs and remunerative prices; two, tensions resulting primarily from the demands of the rural poor consisting of agricultural labourers, small and marginal farmers, artisans and others for minimum wages, civil rights, land reforms, effective implementation of welfare programmes and so on. This paper is concerned with the latter type of rural tensions. The data analysed below relate to incidents of violence against members of the SC's by members of the non-SC's. The evidence from official and other reports is clear that these incidents, in the main, arise as a result of the various demands of the agrarian poor over the issues listed above and that they signify increasing awareness on the part of the rural poor over their rights. A detailed analysis of these incidents in socio-economic rather than law and order terms within the framework of a comprehensive approach regarding the nature of the developmental processes at work would be of great value from the point of policy formulation.
15. The former are concentrated in low income assetless occupations in subsistence agriculture while the latter mostly belong to the agricultural property owning classes belonging to the middle and upper castes.
16. Under this term, the central government has been collecting from state governments details of incidents of 'Murder', 'Rape', 'Grievous Hurt', 'Arson' and 'other offences', all cognisable offences under the Indian Penal Code, in which members of the Scheduled Castes (and Tribes) become victims at the hands of members of non-Scheduled Castes (and Tribes). The assumption is that as distinct from other strata of weaker sections the Scheduled Castes (and Tribes) are specially vulnerable considering their economic plight, social disadvantages and lack of political influence.
17. Some state government officials argue that the definition of the term 'atrocities' by the centre is "unsatisfactory" because most of these offences are of a "socio-economic" nature while only those in which "untouchability" as a social prejudice forms the major causative factor should be classified as "atrocities" proper. Such a distinction is helpful to some state governments in arguing (as some have indeed done) that there are very few "atrocities" in their states and that most of the incidents of violence that take place are of a "socio-economic" nature and will diminish as a result of the action

taken through the development projects specially meant for the weaker sections. The centre has rejected this argument and rightly held that all IPC offences in which the SC's become victims at the hands of non-Scheduled Castes should be reported for purposes of compilation and analysis of data in this regard.

18. The following analysis of violence against the Scheduled Castes would, mutatis-mutandis, be applicable to violence against Scheduled Tribes. The data regarding the former category of violence is collected more systematically. Official reports have from time to time regretted the relative neglect of violence against the Scheduled Tribes. See for example, the report of the parliamentary Committee on the Welfare of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (1985-86), Lok Sabha Secretariat, New Delhi, April 1986.
19. i.e. IPC offences in which the police can make an arrest without a warrant.
20. In the state of Uttar Pradesh, for example, during 1984 there were 12,988 non-cognisable cases against 4,300 cognisable cases. During 1985, these figures were 12,501 and 4,135 respectively. See Indian Express, (New Delhi), March 30, 1986, p.5.
21. Mythili Shivaraman. Thanjavur: Rumblings of class struggle in Tamil Nadu in Kathleen Gough and Hari P. Sharma (ed) Imperialism and Revolution in South Asia (Monthly Review Press, 1973).
22. Committee on the Welfare of Scheduled Castes and Tribes (1985-86), Lok Sabha Secretariat, New Delhi, April 1986.
23. The argument given by some officials that the rise in the number of incidents in these states is due to free registration appears to require analysis because there is an inherent bias in the administration not to record cases and to minimise reported cases. This bias arises from the fact that the more the number of crimes registered in a police station, the more inefficient the station house officer is considered to be, according to prevailing statistical yardsticks. It should further be noted that the largest number of cases are taking place under the head "Other Offences". A detailed analysis of these incidents district-wise and P.s will give a clue as to changes in social and economic relations which lead to these cases. This is not being done by the state Governments. A similar analysis of the much larger number of non-cognisable cases is also necessary.

24. Economic and Political Weekly, Vol. XIV.No.48. December 1, 1979.
25. The information was collected during field work in Tamil Nadu towards the end of 1986. See, office of the Deputy Inspector General of Police, Protection of Civil Rights, Madras, Statistical Information as on 31.12.1985, Statements 14, 15 and 16.
26. During field work in Tamil Nadu it came to light that in many of the villages the approach roads to burial grounds traditionally available to the S.C.'s have been taken over for cultivation by the upper castes. This has led to a good deal of tension. Unfortunately, no documentation on this aspect is available.
27. See for example, the Union Home Minister's D.O. letter to the state Chief Ministers of March 1980, printed in the Annual Report of the Commission for Scheduled Castes and Tribes (Second Report) Annexure XIV, pp. 339-43.
28. The following studies have been used. C.T. Kurien, The Dynamics of Rural Transformation: A Case Study of Tamil Nadu, Working Paper No. 1, Madras Institute of Development Studies, Madras; August 1978; S. Subramanian, Poverty and Inequality in Tamil Nadu Working Paper No.74, MIDS, (July 1986); S. Guhan, Growth Inequalities and Poverty in Tamil Nadu Popular Series No.4, MIDS (June 1982); C.T. Kurien, Poverty in Tamil Nadu: An Assessment, Reprinted from Bulletin, Madras Development Seminar Series Vol. X No.12; E.S. Srinivasan, Rural Artisans in Tamil Nadu, Working Paper No. 20, MIDS (September 1981); V.B. Athreya, Gangaikondan 1916-1984 Change and Stability, Working Paper No. 56, MIDS (June 1985); V.B. Athreya, Vadamalainuram: A Resurvey Working Paper No.50, MIDS (August 1984); S. Guhan and K. Bharathan, Dusi: A Resurvey, Working Paper No.52, MIDS (December 1984); Jean Racine, Urban Strategies in Rural Development: The State, the space and the dynamics of change in a Tamil District Working Paper No. 62, MIDS, (November 1985).
29. C.T. Kurien, "The Dynamics of Rural Transformation" op.cit. p. 26.
30. Ibid. p. 38
31. Ibid. p. 38
32. Ibid. p. 39
33. Ibid. p. 40-42.

34. S. Guhan "Growth, Inequalities and Poverty in Tamil Nadu" MIDS, Madras (June 1983).
35. Ibid. p. 18.
36. Ibid. p. 19.
37. Ibid. p. 19.
38. Ibid. p. 20.
39. See S. Guhan, Village Studies in Tamil Nadu. MIDS Digest Series No. 1, MIDS, Madras 1980 for a good bibliography.
40. V.B. Athreya, Vadamalainuram: A Resurvey, Working Paper No.50, MIDS, Madras (August, 1984); S. Guhan and K. Bharathan, Dusi: A Resurvey, Working Paper No. 52, MIDS, Madras, December 1984; V.B. Athreya, Gangaikondan 1916-1984: Change and Stability, Working paper No. 56, MIDS, Madras (June 1985).
41. V.B. Athreya, Working Paper No. 50, MIDS, Madras (1984) pp. 118, 119, 101.
42. S. Guhan and K. Bharathan, Dusi: A Resurvey, Working Paper No.52, MIDS, Madras (1984) p. 163-68.
43. V.B. Athreya, Gangaikondan 1916-1984: Change and Stability, MIDS Madras (June 1985) p. 134-35.
44. See for example, Ashok Rudra: 'Organisation of agriculture for rural development: The Indian case' in Dharam Ghai et al Agrarian Systems and Rural Development, (ILO, 1979); S. Guhan, Poverty Alleviation in India: Policy, Performance and Possibilities, MIDS, Madras (March 1986). See for an administrator's view, D. Bandyopadhyay 'An Evaluation of Policies and Programmes for the Alleviation of Rural Poverty in India in Huzwanul Islam (ed) Strategies for Alleviating Poverty in Rural Asia (ILO, AFEF), 1985.
45. Rudra, op.cit. p.76
46. Guhan, op.cit. p. 32.
47. V.B. Athreya: 'Shape of a Public Policy for Growth with Social Justice', in Religion and Society. Vol. XXVII No.3, September 1980) p. 38.
48. D. Bandyopadhyay cited at 44 above

49. S. Guhan cited in 44 above, p. 25
50. S. Guhan, *ibid.* pp. 30-31.
51. S. Guhan, *State Finance in Tamil Nadu: 1960-85, A Review of Trends and Policy*, MIDS, Madras (Sept 1986) pp. 122-25.
52. Tamil Nadu has been a major area of agrarian unrest arising from the demands of various categories of farmers during the 80's. This is not the focus of the present paper although it is an important problem for analysis.
53. Robert Wade: *The System of Administrative and Political Corruption: Canal Irrigation in South India* in Journal of Development Studies, 18, No.3, 1982 and Robert Wade, *The Market for Public Office: Why the Indian State is not better at development* in World Development, 13, No.4, 1985 cited in Guhan, *op.cit.* p. 121.
54. A study of public expenditure at the all-India level may be seen in J.F.L. Toye Public Expenditure and Indian Development Policy 1960-70, Cambridge University Press, 1981; Robert Wade, *Review of Toye (1981) in Economic Development and Cultural Change* 1984; P.K. Bardhan Political Economy of Development in India, B. Blackwell (1984) all cited in Guhan, *op.cit.* p. 125. These views are important coming as they do from an experienced former civil servant.
55. Joan P. Mencher, Agriculture and Social Structure in Tamil Nadu: Past Origins, Present Transformations and Future Prospects (Allied Publishers, 1978) Chapters IX and X.
56. Jean Racine, Urban Strategies in Rural Development: The state, the space and the dynamics of change in a Tamil District, MIDS, Madras (Nov. 1985).
57. *Ibid.* p. 27
58. *Ibid.* p. 27
59. Kuldeep Mathur "Bureaucracy and the New Agricultural Strategy" New Delhi (Concept 1982), V.A. Pai Panandikar et al, *Development Bureaucracy*, New Delhi (Oxford, IHI, 1983).
60. Jean Racine. *op.cit.* pp. 42-48

61. Ibid. p. 42-43
62. Ibid. p. 43-44
63. Judith Heyer, Attempting to Reach the Rural Poor? The Small Farmer Development Agency in Varandm Village, Coimbatore, MIDS, Madras, (1981) p. 62-64
64. Madras Institute of Development Studies, Structure and Intervention: An Evaluation of DPAP, IRP and Related Programmes in Ramanathanpuram and Dharmapuri Districts of Tamil Nadu, (Aug 1980). See especially chapters 4, 16 & 17.
- 64A. A profile of the administrative situation and radical activities in the Dharmapuri district prepared by a voluntary agency in Tamil (abridged and translated by the author into English) is appended in Annexure IV.
65. See footnote 12 above
66. The following analysis incorporates information glean from press reports and insights obtained during field work in Tamil Nadu (October-November 1986). The sequence of events was broadly verified during field work and interviews with various strata of the rural poor and their representatives. While the public version broadly tended to support the version in the press, there were two schools of thought in the administration. The police version largely focussed attention on the security aspects of the so-called Naxalite problem in the state; the non-police view, mainly articulated by senior IAS officials, was critical of the police view and stressed the need for more humane administrative interventions to deal with agrarian discontent arising out of genuine demands of the rural poor.
67. The Central Government representing one set of social forces is able to adopt a liberal posture in regard to certain policies and programmes for the rural poor. The state government representing a different set of social forces seeks to come down heavily on the organised assertion of their rights by the rural poor. The role of the central Government is 'ideological' that of the state government is 'practical'. I owe this interesting observation to Prof. Mohit Bhattacharya
68. Interview, Madras, October 1986



69. Interview with a senior police official in Madras, Oct. 1986.
70. Interview with a senior police official in Madras, Oct. 1986.
71. Ibid.
72. Thumb-nail sketches of these landlords, by no means untypical persons, may be seen in the Annexure V. The sketches were prepared during field work in Tamil Nadu in October, 1986.
73. Eta Gebert, The Politics of Policy Implementation: IRDP in Tiruchi district (Mimeo, Work-in-Progress Seminar, Madras Institute of Development Studies, Madras, November, 5, 1986).
74. S R Maheshwari "Rural Development in India" (Delhi, Sage Publications, 1985) pp. 175-226; D. Bandyopadhyay, An Evaluation of Policies and programmes for the Alleviation of Rural Poverty in India in Rizwanul Islam (ed) Strategies for Alleviating Poverty in Rural Asia (ILO, 1985) pp. 141-47; A R Desai "Rural Development and Human Rights in India", Economic and Political Weekly, August 1, 1987, pp. 1291-6.
75. D. Bandyopadhyay, op.cit., p. 143.
76. Ibid. p. 145
77. Ibid. p. 147.
78. A perceptive analysis of this function of the police during the British period, which continues even today may be seen in David Arnold "Police Power and Colonial, Madras Police 1859-1947" (Oxford University Press, 1986).
79. D. Bandyopadhyay, External Impediments to the Growth of Organisations of the Rural Poor in India, National Labour Institute Bulletin, Vol. 3, No. 10, October 1977, p. 418.
80. Ibid. p. 419. The following extract from the report of the Working Group is worth quoting in full:
- 'Here we were shown a vast tract of land - according to the local statement approx. 800 acres - wherefrom about 250 bataidars were evicted by sheer physical force by the employees of the Darbhanga Raj in 1970. Since then they had been trying to get back possession of the land, but to no effect. 14 criminal cases were

80. instituted against these share-croppers. Altogether 32 persons suffered imprisonment as undertrial prisoners and they were being harassed very frequently by the police and the magistracy. When it was asked why they did not move the magistrate for obtaining an order under Section 144 Cr.P.C. in their favour against the Darbhanga Raj, the bataidars and the accompanying officials looked gapingly at us. That Section 144 Cr.P.C. could also be applied against the landowners and in favour of the abtaidars was something quite surprising to both the parties."
81. The following extract from D. Bandyopadhyay's study, "Bargadars of Salihan" is worth reproduction in full in the context of our paper:

"Nowhere in the Indian administrative set-up so much authority and control over different governmental agencies is concentrated as in the office of the District Officer. Yet the magistrate in him can, merrily and without any compunction, frustrate the function of his other personality as Collector. The reasons, perhaps, lie in the sanctified tradition of the district administration in India that order has got to be maintained at all cost, if necessary, even at the cost of law. Belief in inherent superiority of the criminal laws is so strong among the officers at the district level and below that in case of any apparent conflict between the criminal law and the land reforms law, the former is always given unquestioned precedence over the latter."
82. A very perceptive analysis of this aspect may be seen in Sheela Barse "Police and Social Legislation" in the S.V.P. National Police Academy Magazine, Vol. 39, No. 1, Jan-June, 1987 pp. 28-30.
83. Ibid. p. 29.
- 83A. A very good recent example of the divergence of perception of IAS officers as opposed to IPS officers in this regard is the incident of abduction of some IAS officers by some Naxalites in Andhra Pradesh (See the report by R.J. Rajendra Prasad in The Hindu, Jan, 7, 1987, p. 8). The IAS officers argue that the rural development work cannot be carried on by IAS officers with a large contingent of security personnel as this would alienate the tribal population. The IPS Director General of Police on the other hand insisted on the officials being accompanied by security personnel in the interest of their security and safety.



84. Mohit Bhattacharya, "Crisis of Public Administration as a discipline in India" Economic and Political Weekly, November 28, 1987, pp. 139-42.
85. See, in this connection, A.K.N. Reddy, Supply side Approach to Energy in Crisis I & II Times of India, 25 and 26 Dec. 1987 p.6.
86. A.S. Bhalla, "A Review of Indian Agriculture 1947-87" Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, Teen Murti House, New Delhi, 28.9.87 (Seminar Notes).
87. Report of the Sub-Committee of the Parliamentary consultative Committee for the Ministry of Labour for Studying and Reporting on the Problems of Unorganised Workers in the Agriculture Sector (Ministry of Labour, (Ministry of Labour, Dec. 1987)
88. See an interesting analysis in this connection by K Balagopal, "Our Democratic Future?" Lokayan Bulletin (Oct. 1987) pp. 37-44. More specifically, in the context of the situation in Tamil Nadu the following observations are made in a recent essay: 'MGR was obsessed with secrecy and the state, tottering under an oppressive police regime, lost all its remnant symbols of democracy. His government got away with the most atrocious human rights violations and broke all norms of constitutional freedom and decency. Files never moved. Officers' telephones were tapped. High Court judges were trailed. The Government became increasingly anti-labour.' See 'The Man Who Played God-And Won' by A Correspondent, The Sunday Statesman, Miscellany, January 17, 1988, pp. 1-4.

Number of cases of atrocities on Scheduled Castes during 1982 and 1983  
(Selected Districts)

District	Year	Murder	Grievous hurt	Rape	Arson	Other IPC cases	Total
North Arcot	1982	2	-	1	2	9	14
	1983	-	-	3	-	11	14
Thanjavur East	1982	-	2	-	-	44	46
	1983	-	-	1	-	88	89
Periyar	1982	1	-	-	-	21	22
	1983	-	-	-	-	5	5
Madurai South	1982	-	-	-	-	2	2
	1983	-	-	-	-	18	18
Madurai North	1982	1	2	-	-	-	3
	1983	6	1	1	-	14	22
Ramanad East	1982	1	1	-	-	3	5
	1983	3	1	2	-	26	32
Ramanad West	1982	-	-	-	-	-	-
	1983	4	-	1	-	9	14
Tirunelveli	1982	-	-	-	1	35	36
	1983	-	-	1	-	42	43
Kanyakumari	1982	-	-	-	-	10	10
	1983	-	-	-	-	7	7

Source : Compiled from Statistical Information as on 31.12.1985 Statements 14, 15 and 16, Office of the Deputy Inspector General of Police, Protection of Civil Rights, Madras.

ANNEXURE II

Number of cases of atrocities on Scheduled Castes during 1984  
(Selected Districts)

District	Murder	Grievous Hurt	Rape	Arson	Other IPC cases	Total
South Arcot	-	-	-	-	30	30
North Arcot	-	6	4	-	43	53
Dharmapuri	-	-	1	-	8	9
Tiruchirappalli	1	-	-	1	76	78
Thanjavur East	-	1	1	-	66	68
Thanjavur West	-	-	-	-	76	76
Pudukottai	-	-	-	-	21	21
Chimbatore Rural	1	-	2	1	35	39
Periyar	-	-	1	-	52	53
Madurai South	-	-	1	1	40	42
Madurai North	1	1	2	2	42	48
Ramnad East	-	1	-	2	21	24
Ramnad West	1	2	1	-	28	32
Tirunelveli	1	1	1	-	73	76

Source:

Same as at Annexure-I

ANNEXURE III

Number of cases of atrocities on Scheduled Castes During 1985  
(Selected District)

	Murder	Grievous Hurt	Rape	Arson	Other IPC cases	Total
Chingleput West	1	-	-	-	24	25
South Arcot	-	-	-	-	30	30
North Arcot	-	-	1	3	31	35
Salen	-	-	-	-	24	24
Trichy	5	1	2	4	44	56
Thanjavur East	4	4	2	-	74	84
Thanjavur West	-	-	-	-	77	77
Pudukottai	1	-	-	-	30	31
Gimbatore Urban	-	-	2	-	9	11
Gimbatore Rural	-	-	1	-	48	49
Periyar	-	-	-	-	107	107
Madurai City	-	1	-	-	26	27
Madurai Rural	3	1	4	1	62	71
Anna District	1	1	1	-	37	40
Ramanathapuram	1	-	-	2	30	33
Pasumpon Muthu- ramalingam	1	-	-	-	12	13
Kamarajar	1	1	1	-	27	30
Tirunelveli	1	1	2	2	70	76

Source: Same as at Annexure-I

ANNEXURE IV

The Administrative Situation and Radical Activities in  
Dhamapuri District

The Dhamapuri district is one of the most backward districts of India with less than 65 cm. rain annually. It suffers from drought more than the nearby districts do. It also has serious problems of drinking water supply. There are seventeen lakhs people living on 9,63,324 hectare in this district. Of this 3 lakhs hectares are cultivatable. Another 3 lakhs hectares consist of hills, and forests. Cultivation depends on rain fall. Employment opportunities are limited. Industry is limited too. Due to lack of capital and skills the district is characterised by industrial backwardness despite, the concessions announced by the Central Government. At present most of the industries here have been started by people belonging to Karnataka. Bangalore is close by; many workers come from Bangalore to Hosur everyday. The district has 18 Panchayat Unions. Since Independence, the district has not been represented in the State cabinet.

The river Cauvery enters Tamil Nadu through Hogenakkal in this district. Still, thousands of villagers do not have drinking water. About 30% of the people of this district belong to the Scheduled Caste and Tribes. There are two parliamentary constituency and nine State Assembly

constituencies including Harur (reserved). Due to severe unemployment the local people are forced to lose faith in life. When young men of different classes achieve maturity they turn to Marxist thinking.

The district has a District Development Corporation under the direct supervision of the District Collector. About Rs. 7 crores are given by the Central Government for the development of the district, according to reports. Still, no significant development has taken place. There are few social service organisations in this district, because the police and ruling circle oppose the spread of socio-economic awareness. Attempts to generate awareness are regarded as extremist activities.

This district was first part of the Salem Revenue district under the authority of the Salem Revenue Board. In 1960, when K. Kamaraj was Chief Minister, the district was created with Dhamapuri as headquarters. At that time, there were very few primary schools. Even after the district came into existence, higher Education had to be had outside the district for many years. No Industry by Government or private parties was started. In this situation, hunger, unemployment, starvation etc. were prevalent. Wet lands in certain areas were under control of landlords who, exploiting hunger, indulged in moneylending at exorbitant interest. Taking advantage of the inability to repay, many poor people were converted into bonded slaves; similarly many small

farmers mortgaged their small plots of lands to landlords at high interest and lost their lands because of inability to repay. Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes are specially affected by social and economic exploitation and injustice. (During Emergency, the large number of cases against money-lenders were started in this district.)

During the 50's and 60's, organisations such as Nehru Yuvak Kendra, were started to generate social awareness among the poor. These organisations led to enthusiasm on the part of many youngsters who were victims of caste atrocities, exploitation and so on. Youths educated at Madras, Coimbatore, Madurai and so on wanted to fight these atrocities. Balan was one of them. He was from a hamlet called Naickan Kottai near Dhamapuri. He studied upto B.Sc. in Dhamapuri and went to Madras for his M.Sc. At Madras he came in contact with some friends from Andhra Pradesh who were active in the communist movement. He also came in contact with CPI(MI) leaders, like Charu Mazumdar. He took these leaders to Dhamapuri district to educate the people about social problems.. The Naxalites were active in the North Arcot District; they did not take long to spread to the Dhamapuri district.. Balan and his young friends had frequent public meetings and classes on local economic problems. In 1970, he completed studies in Madras and returned to his village to devote himself to political and organisations activities.

Acute unemployment led many young people to join Balan's activities. They believed in violence to eliminate poverty and inequality. This affected land lords, money lenders and other filthy rich. They solicited police help and support to continue their exploitation. Politicians who were also part of the network used the police machinery to harass Balan and other activists and to show them as anti-national elements. Moreover, the DIG of police of the area, tried to get a good name from the Government by exaggerating the situation and dealing with it by violent and illegal methods. As a result, Balan was imprisoned for four years. In 1978, he came out of prison and started political activities again. Meanwhile, the district police authorities magnified the situation, obtained special powers from the State Government to deal with radical activists, who in some cases used violence against landlords and moneylenders. The police and ruling circles tried to suppress and destroy the Naxalites. Even ordinary crime like murder, and dacoity were attributed to the so-called Naxalite. False reports and advertisements were published in the press. Many other unjust methods were adopted. Balan was arrested and subjected to torture. The police took him to the Dhamapuri hospital where his condition deteriorated. About 5,000 people came to see him one day. The police were frightened and took Balan to Madras where he died on September 12, 1980. Balan's death did not deter his friends but they were subjected to torture by the police.



Kannamani was arrested and killed. Many atrocities were committed.

Many of the bonded labours released during the last few years are from Thaimanuri district. In this district, the largest number of money lenders operated with official connivance. Many educated and politically influential people also indulging money-lending. The affected people were mostly Scheduled Castes and Tribes. In many villages. Harijans are still not allowed into temples nor permitted to wear the footwar. In hotels, Harijan are given separate tumblers. The Scheduled Tribes remain very backward in all respects. They are exploited by traders, forest-officers. Forest officers in particular use various methods to harass and exploit the poor Tribals. Many false cases are laoded against them. Similarly, the police department also treats the tribal people as less than insects. Very few of the concessions announced by the Central and State Governments reach the tribals. About 2,000 hectares of land belonging to the Tribals have been appropriated by non-tribals belonging to a particular caste and the police about forty years ago. The tribals who once possessed fertile lands are now seen living in huts by the roadside.

Source: Abridged and translated by the author from the original document in Tamil prepared by a local voluntary agency (1986).

ANNEXURE IV

Profiles of two typical landlords

I

Kesava Reddy of Ponneri village in Tirunattur taluk, killed by the so-called naxalites alongwith his concubine and grand-daughter on May 15, 1980, is a typical example of a Reddiar with his origins in the pre-independence days rising to political power through economic clout rooted in feudal values.

Kesava Reddy had a patch of land that was not remunerative enough. So he had to vend milk in the nearby villages for his existence. He also cycled through the neighbourhood peddling boiled rice. The emergence of Panchayat Raj and Co-operative institutions opened new vistas of prosperity.

The pushy type of man with drive who could be impressive, came to the forefront in those days when wheeling and dealing in contracts and government welfare programmes had just begun. Even a wealthy landlord owning 100 acres would demur before embarking on any 'gram rajya' because he was 'noble' and chose to abide by the feudal code of ethics that a man shall exploit and earn only honestly as the convention allows. These landlords were apprehensive about bribing officials, hoarding goods and clandestine sale of

their produce for profit. To their thinking these were 'wrong' and 'indecent' means to enrichment. While they would exploit the landless labourer or harijan as sanctioned by ancestral prejudices and conventional authority, they would shy away from anything that was not open or forthright. With the reluctance of the 'noble' feudals to enter the wheeling-dealing, contracting, cooperatives and panchayat raj opened up valuable for persons like Kesava Reddy.

The diehard feudals stuck to certain scruples even in their exploitation. But the others easy on their scruples, quickly began to use corrupting ways of the new administrative system that formed the panchayat raj and cooperative. The panchayat president, for instance, would be initiated into corruption by the petty officials and block development officials. The whole rung of this village administrative hierarchy from the gram sevak upwards was corrupt. They schooled the earthy feudal into profitable corruption through shockingly devious methods. For instance, money was claimed for construction of threshing grounds in villages by the officials and a cut in the 'take' palmed off to the panchayat members. This was ridiculous because in the predominantly agricultural area there would hardly be a village without a threshing ground. Resolutions for these grants and their expenditure were signed after a casual reading by most of the panchayat members, either because they

were illiterate or because their social position would not allow them to ask questions.

The degeneration of the panchayat raj and cooperative institutions, now in a state of decay, began from their inception, with the village panchayat president being schooled in the corrupt ways of the town - tempting and bribing officials, diverting money from welfare grants and falsification of accounts.

The corruption became so pervasive that the villagers were demoralised by the immoral, illegal and unlawful acts of their feudal lords.

In this environment of permissive morality, Kesava Reddy rose to prominence in Ponneri, a very large panchayat. He shored up his power by association with some top MK leaders and himself grew into a heavyweight MK figure in the area.

Kesava Reddy was a very clever man. He turned the tables on the petty officials, on whose patronage he had been dependent, by using his new found political power. He freed himself from their thrall and exercised his power such that in sharing the spoils he cornered the lion's share.

Kesava Reddy was one of the first to successfully reverse the roles this way. The immediate post-independence generation of freedom fighters who were honest had already made their exit from the panchayats and cooperatives before the end of the decade. The new elements who formed the Congress party in the area were pioneers in corrupting the

entire administrative machinery. When the DMK came to power in 1967 partymen had unfettered right to 'intervention' (interference?) in the administration.

DMK's first chief minister C.N. Annadurai had exhorted his followers to 'take personal responsibility for the effective running of the administration'. Annadurai's intentions might have been different, but his followers literally took over the administration! One such person was Kesava Reddy.

Kesava Reddy, now endowed with more resources that he had ever honed for, purchased more lands. He started alternative cultivation of cash crops, mechanised agricultural operations in his lands and constructed a bungalow-type house. Conscious of his new status he expected submission from one and all.

Kesava Reddy had burgeoned into an unquestioned monarch till Seeralan of the same village emerged as a peasant leader. He belonged to the Vandiya community which though it enjoyed a higher place in the caste hierarchy is in no way different from the harijans in terms of economic status. Most members of this community are landless agricultural labourers and small and tenant farmers. Highly immoral, Kesava Reddy took the panchayat medical worker as his concubine. His filthy and obscene invectives, which no human sensibilities can tolerate, were directed at the Harijans. He would arrogantly proclaim: 'I have seen the cunts of all the pariah

women in this village. Either I had seen them or these women had willingly shown them to me. Sugarcane fields and vineyards are my bedrooms. These pariahs have the guts to oppose me because they are born out of my semen or my forefathers' semen. These fellows are half-Beddys." There were two attempts on his life but he survived. He declared: "Because I am a Reddiar the daggers of pariahs cannot penetrate my skin."

Vellaya Gounder of Dadampatti village near Dharmapuri was the leader of the entire anti-naxalite forces there.

## II

Vellaya Gounder of Dadampatti village near Dharmapuri was the leader of the entire anti-naxalite forces there. He was the President of the People's Welfare Protection Committee hatched out with police connivance. His antecedents were so bad that he happened to be one of the most despicable creatures. During Nehru's days as Prime Minister the best farmers who had shown the highest yields were awarded a cash prize with the title of 'Krishi Pandit'. This man collected the crops of the neighbouring fields, used his local influence, bribed the officials and got the title and a tractor. Everyone in the area knew that it was a great fraud and calculated cheating, his getting the 'Krishi Pandit' title. He went to Delhi and received the title from Jawaharlal Nehru.

Vellaya Gounder, a debauch, who molested any hapless woman and was notorious for his atrocities, joined the DMK later. To raise a fortune for his daughter's marriage, he obtained a road contract and without construction of even a metre-length of road he got the officials to sign and sanction his bills. A semi-literate man, given to opulent living, he owned foreignmade cars, tape recorders and all kinds of modern contraptions and gadgets.

His links with the police were so close that he was made president of the People's Welfare Protection Committee, when it was formed. His house functioned virtually as the police station. Peasant activists or Youth League members released on conditional bail were asked to appear before him and record their statements in the register kept in his house.

Source: Civil and Human Rights of Agricultural Labourers in Tamil Nadu by Shastri Ramachandran and K. Manoharan (November 1981) (Mimeo).

TABLE I

Agricultural work force in Tamil Nadu 1961, 1971 and 1981

	(per cent)		
	<u>1961</u>	<u>1971</u>	<u>1981</u>
Cultivators	42.07	31.26	29.40
Agricultural labour	18.42	30.46	31.45
	<hr/>	<hr/>	<hr/>
	60.49	61.72	60.85
Other workers	39.51	38.28	39.15
	<hr/>	<hr/>	<hr/>
All workers	100.00	100.00	100.00

Source: Census of India 1961, 1971 and 1981 cited in  
S. Guhan Growth, Inequalities and Poverty in  
Tamil Nadu, MIDS, June 1983, Popular Series  
No.4. p. 34.



TABLE II

Distribution of ownership holdings in Tamil Nadu 1971-72

Size class of household ownership holding (acres)	Cumulative percentage of households	Cumulative percentage of area owned
Unto 0.99	60.53	4.45
1.00- 2.49	78.40	20.23
2.50- 4.99	89.79	42.07
5.00- 7.49	94.55	58.02
7.50- 9.99	96.54	67.28
10.00-14.99	98.55	80.27
15.00-19.99	99.27	87.00
20.00-24.99	99.54	90.25
25.00-29.99	99.69	92.49
30.00-49.99	99.91	96.91
50.00 and above	100.00	100.00

Source: NSS Report 215 Vol.I (Rural Table 2) cited in S. Guhan, op.cit. p. 35.

TABLE III

Concentration in the ownership of assets in rural Tamil Nadu

1971-72

Decile group	Percentage share in total assets owned
0 - 10	0.04
10 - 20	0.15
20 - 30	0.32
30 - 40	0.58
40 - 50	0.97
50 - 60	1.61
60 - 70	2.75
70 - 80	5.08
80 - 90	10.86
90 - 95	12.47
0 - 95	34.83
95 - 99	26.20
99 - 100	38.97
	100.00

Source: C.T. Kurian Dynamic of Rural Transformation A Study of Tamil Nadu 1950-1975 Orient Longman 1981 based on RBI's All-India Debt and Investment Survey 1971-72 cited in S. Guhan, op.cit. p. 36.

TABLE IV

Relative position of Tamil Nadu in rural poverty  
(Percentage of rural poor)

Year	Tamil Nadu	All-India	Rank of Tamil Nadu (from the bottom)
1957-58	67.8	53.4	1
1959-60	64.4	48.7	1
1960-61	53.9	42.0	3
1961-62	51.0	42.3	2
1963-64	52.0	49.1	6
1964-65	57.4	50.4	5
1965-66	59.5	51.1	4
1966-67	62.7	57.4	6
1967-68	58.1	57.9	7
1968-69	60.6	53.5	4
1970-71	57.3	49.1	4
1973-74	48.3	47.6	7

Source: Derived from Montek S. Ahluwallia Rural Poverty in India: 1956-57 to 1973-74, World Bank Staff Working Paper No. 279 May 1978. cited in S. Guhan, op.cit. p. 37.